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Official Records

Fifty-third Session

9th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 22 September 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Wijdenbosch (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Address by Mr. Pierre Buyoya, President of the Republic of Burundi

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Burundi.

Mr. Pierre Buyoya, President of the Republic of Burundi, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Burundi, His Excellency Mr. Pierre Buyoya, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Buyoya (*interpretation from French*): The fifty-third session of the General Assembly provides us once again with an opportunity to look at the overall situation in the world and to reflect together on the future of the peoples and the nations that we represent.

But first of all, may I extend to Mr. Didier Opertti our warm and sincere congratulations on his well-deserved election, which is but recognition of his intellectual and personal qualities and which, I am certain, will ensure the success of the work of this session. We would like also to pay a warm tribute to his predecessor, who presided so brilliantly over the work of the previous session.

My delegation is pleased to express appreciation for the courageous and ongoing work being carried out by Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, in support of peace in the world and particularly on the African continent.

When on 25 July 1996 we had to carry out a very radical change of government in Burundi, the political situation was an explosive one. Every day Burundians were dying without really knowing why, and the threat of genocide and widespread chaos was a very real danger.

I shall not go into the details of that situation, as the Security Council, the Secretary-General and his representative in Bujumbura have followed on a daily basis the evolution of the crisis which has in recent years disrupted my country.

Since that change on 25 July 1996, we have stated clearly that restoration of security and the beginning of a peace process are our basic concerns.

This fifty-third session provides me with an opportunity to tell you about the efforts made by the people of Burundi, its leaders and the international community to attain our goals of restoring a lasting peace in the country. Despite some acts of terrorism, I can say to this Assembly that security has now been fully restored in Burundi. The threat of genocide so feared by its people is gone today. Two years ago the peace process was initiated; it is now under way and proceeding in a manner satisfactory to all those concerned. I should like to focus my statement today on this peace project.

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The idea of a peace-process project in Burundi is based on the realization that despite the ethnic turn taken by violence which brought such tragedy to my country over the last five years, the underlying cause of the Burundi crisis is essentially a political one. That is why we are focusing our efforts on seeking a political solution to the crisis.

Two years ago we set in motion a peace process which was divided into two aspects: the internal aspect and the external aspect. At the internal level, the dynamic provided by the peace process led to a domestic agreement on political partnership. Two years ago, the Government which emerged from the change of 25 July 1996 and the National Assembly elected in 1993 began a dialogue geared towards a political rapprochement. This initiative led to an agreement on political partnership.

Today, we have a provisional constitution which came out of that partnership and which governs the institutions of our Republic, primarily the Government and the National Assembly. In Burundi, the political partnership is a reality not only between Government and the National Assembly but also with the majority of the registered political parties and the representatives of civil society who have joined the partnership for peace. It is within this framework that a negotiated Government, bringing together the main political forces in the country, is now in place and has been functioning for three months. The National Assembly elected in 1993 has been expanded to include representatives of other registered political parties and representatives of civil society.

I can say to this Assembly — and those who have visited Burundi recently have been able to note this themselves — that this partnership has transformed, and continues to transform, the political landscape in Burundi in a positive way. Today, the political class within our country is organizing a wide-ranging discussion on the partnership to enable the people of Burundi to absorb the idea of peace, the ultimate objective being stabilization of the country through the restoration of peace.

The Government, for its part, is preparing its programme based on the political agreement which emerged from the partnership. The major issues, such as democracy, justice, security and development, are in the forefront of this programme which the Government will be submitting to the parliament at its next session in October. My Government is determined to continue consolidating the partnership within the country. We deeply believe that this approach can establish the bases for an overall agreement associating our compatriots living abroad with our peace project.

It was the existence of this political partnership at the domestic level which made possible the beginning of a process of global negotiations involving Burundians abroad in the peace process. The negotiations, bringing together people of Burundi living at home and abroad, began on 15 June 1998 in Arusha, in the United Republic of Tanzania. The second negotiating session took place on 20 July, and the third meeting is scheduled for 12 October. These negotiations are proceeding in a manner satisfactory to all the participants: the Burundians, the facilitator and the representatives of the international community.

I should like to declare that the Government of Burundi is resolved to do its utmost to assure the success of these negotiations. We divided the peace process into two aspects, domestic and external, because it is simply a question of methodology. The peace process is one and indivisible. First of all, we wanted to get the people of Burundi involved in the peace process before the Arusha negotiations, so that we could take into consideration the recent experience of our subregion. Peace negotiations which do not involve the people often take a tragic turn.

I should like to declare from this rostrum that the peace process is now under way to the satisfaction of the people of Burundi. We are determined to resolve through dialogue the dispute pitting Burundians one against the other. Unfortunately, there are obstacles along our path towards lasting peace, the main one being the economic sanctions imposed on Burundi on 31 July 1996. These economic sanctions affect in particular the most vulnerable sectors of our society. They are destroying the economic and social fabric of the country and over the long term are jeopardizing stabilization over the long term in our country. In fact, the impact of the embargo on the people of Burundi is devastating. Let me give you a few figures: grade school attendance has dropped from 70 to 43 per cent; the vaccination rate has plummeted from 80 to 40 per cent and malnutrition among children under the age of 5 is now 43 per cent.

Moreover, the embargo imposed on Burundi is now enriching a few individuals in the country in a scandalous manner and is tragically impoverishing millions of people there. This embargo is eroding trust between the mediators and the parties to the conflict, particularly the Government of Burundi. Even though all the conditions imposed by those who initiated the embargo have now been met, the economic sanctions are still being

maintained. Today there is absolutely no justification, moral or political, for continuing the embargo against Burundi.

I would appeal to the countries of our subregion and to the mediator organizing the negotiations in Arusha to lift the embargo before it definitively torpedoes our peace project. Our appeal is also directed to the international community for support in our effort at peace-building in Burundi.

We must act now to concert our peace efforts. Tomorrow will be too late. Those who have sinned by omission will bear an important responsibility.

The other significant obstacle to peace in Burundi is the continuing violence perpetrated by armed factions based in the territories of certain neighbouring countries. I call on those countries to assume their share of the responsibility. One cannot both call for negotiations and tolerate terrorist actions by armed groups without jeopardizing the entire peace process. For negotiations to begin, there must be a cessation of hostilities.

Burundi, a landlocked country under economic sanctions, needs international solidarity. Humanitarian assistance must be stepped up in order to help those afflicted by this crisis. We would wish to see international cooperation with our country resumed without further delay. Security conditions are no worse in Burundi than in the other countries of the Great Lakes region. Burundians simply ask to be treated fairly. Our commitment and resolve to achieve peace in Burundi through dialogue must no longer be called into question. The facts today speak for themselves. We are negotiating with all Burundians who have political demands.

My country's domestic concerns will not allow me to forget the other problems afflicting Africa and the world. Far from it.

At this time of globalization, a sustained effort must be made by the international community to promote balanced development throughout the world. Africa deserves special attention. If one advocates development through trade, then one must also increase official development assistance to stimulate the growth of economies that remain fragile. Africa is being crushed by the weight of its debt. The burden must be eased and eliminated for the poorest countries. Globalization without solidarity with the poorest nations will not lead to a peaceful world.

In order to adapt to inevitable changes, the developing countries must organize themselves. Here, I envision the creation of regional areas of integration that will make our economies viable. We are in favour of regional integration, but one that respects the identity and sovereignty of each country. We are opposed to regional integration that includes the domination and hegemony of the most powerful.

Regional economic integration can be achieved, however, only in secure regions. Our region of the Great Lakes remains subject to extreme instability. This cyclical insecurity has endured for decades and has unleashed floods of refugees. Entire defeated armies move through the region, which has already experienced an unprecedented genocide.

We continue to follow very carefully the evolution of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I wish to reaffirm that our country, Burundi, is in no way involved in that conflict. However, we remain concerned, on the one hand, by a certain tenor of statement that pits peoples against peoples on the basis of ethnic identity; and, on the other, by militias and certain rebels, whom we in the region remember only too well. I would urge all participants in this conflict not to allow themselves to be entrapped and led down that road, because it leads only to danger that could engulf the entire region in flames.

Burundi will continue to ensure that its security is not destabilized. To that end, we shall take all appropriate measures. We continue to advocate peaceful means and dialogue to resolve this conflict. If the Government of Burundi is asked to contribute to a political solution, it will be very happy to do so.

In Burundi, we believe that the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations should coordinate their efforts more effectively in seeking a solution to the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly when we consider the limitations of subregional organizations.

At the global level, every region of our planet faces varying degrees of environmental degradation, terrorism, endemic disease, drug abuse and hunger, to mention only the most widespread threats. To cope with this situation, the United Nations will have to play a decisive role. Our Organization has, in the past, demonstrated its strengths and its weaknesses.

To take up these many challenges, the United Nations must open itself up and become more democratic if it is to become more effective in addressing the realities of the modern world. In order better to resolve the problems of peace, the Security Council should be judiciously expanded to include other Members of the Organization.

Within the United Nations, Burundi will continue to raise its modest voice against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and in favour of allocating greater resources to combat poverty and encourage education and health, particularly in developing countries — in short, to build a more balanced and fairer world. In our view, this is the challenge facing our Organization as we approach the new millennium.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Burundi for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Pierre Buyoya, President of the Republic of Burundi, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Flight-Lieutenant (Rtd.) Jerry John Rawlings, President of the Republic of Ghana

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Ghana.

Flight-Lieutenant (Rtd.) Jerry John Rawlings, President of the Republic of Ghana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Mr. Jerry John Rawlings, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Rawlings: Thank you very much, Sir. But I prefer to be called "Flight-Lieutenant" and not "Mr."

I join preceding speakers in congratulating the President and the other members of the Bureau on your election to direct the affairs of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. I am indeed very confident that under your wise leadership the outcome of our deliberations will constitute a great step forward in our efforts to build a new world which meets the aspirations of our peoples in the search for peace, justice and prosperity.

May I also avail myself of this opportunity to express the deep appreciation of my delegation for the remarkable achievements of Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, under whose able guidance the Assembly at the preceding session took very important decisions on United Nations reform intended to prepare the Organization for the immense challenges ahead as we move into the twenty-first century.

In these laudable efforts, we also recognize the bold initiatives and drive of our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose vision for the future of the United Nations, corresponding so much with that of the general membership and the peoples of the world, facilitated the continuing process of reform. We in Ghana and indeed in Africa are proud to have for a son a man of his stature and drive.

The commemoration this year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affords us the opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved over the years and map out well-defined strategies to improve the quality of life of our peoples, by effectively promoting and protecting their fundamental rights, which the Declaration holds as a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations.

Women's rights must be at the centre of that process and we should remain focused on their worldwide promotion and protection. It is their right. It is our obligation. The work of the United Nations in strengthening the equal status and the human rights of women, from the World Conference on Human Rights to the Fourth World Conference on Women, is indeed commendable.

Almost fifty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 12 million children under five years of age die every year from preventable diseases, 200 million children under five years of age are undernourished and 110 million are denied basic education. Eight hundred million people have no access to the most basic health services, and 1.3 billion human beings live in abject poverty around the world. This state of affairs persists because of the inequitable international economic system which discriminates against a developing world, particularly Africa.

The President took the Chair.

The persistent critical economic situation in Africa should be of great concern to the international community and should prompt us all to take effective and urgent

measures to address its underlying causes. Many of our countries, particularly the poorer ones, continue to suffer from a heavy debt burden and crippling debt-servicing obligations, which, by diverting resources away from development, prevent us from providing adequate social services to our populations in basic areas such as education and health and therefore reduce our capacity to compete in the global market.

In this regard, we stress the need for debt-relief measures to be accompanied by concessional financial assistance, particularly to the least developed countries, with the aim of enhancing the implementation of economic reforms and creating a stable environment that enables countries to extricate themselves from the debt overhang.

The international reverberations of the recent financial turmoil in Asia and elsewhere, I believe, point to the futility of any notions that any nation can play outside the rules, that any nation in this world can stand alone.

In my view, the present approach of certain industrialized countries who require developing countries to adhere to standards or policies which they themselves do not observe, or seem unable to observe, will severely test relations between the developed and the developing countries in the next century.

We must stand together if we are not to jeopardize the prosperity enjoyed by hundreds of millions today and the hopes of billions more for a life of dignity and a healthy measure of comfort — nothing more, nothing less.

The new times we live in require new ideas suitable to the dynamics of today. Policy makers and opinion leaders in the developed countries bear great responsibility in this regard, as we all do, for providing very clear leadership of integrity. Much is demanded of those countries that share a great part of the blame for the present state of the world, as they no doubt have the means to be able to provide what it takes.

Even though it had been clear for some time that sustainable development around the globe could not be achieved without a measure of fairness in economic relations between North and South, because of short-term considerations of profit and advantage, the countries benefiting from the unjust economic order chose to ignore the serious impact of that situation on living standards in most parts of the world as well as in limiting world economic growth.

Instead, we received sermons on the truths, realities and moralities of life, and countries and peoples were victimized if they were shown not to have lived up to expectations. That was the price, in other words, that we had to pay. It was obvious, however, that whenever a situation required moral leadership from the capitals of those countries which preached morality in the first place, that morality manifested itself as no more than national interest.

No one questions the need for States to look out for their national interests. However, it is the blindness to the need for enlightened self-interest that has lain at the heart of the divisions between our States for so long, and which has finally shaken the economic confidence of people, whether in the North or the South, in recent times.

The end of the cold war has unleashed new threats to global and regional peace. Intra-State conflicts, rooted in ethnic, racial and religious intolerance, pose a threat to the security of many States and regions. The tardiness and selectivity of the international community in dealing with some of these conflict situations have been rather disturbing, as they have undermined the concept of collective security enshrined in our noble Charter. Article 24 of the Charter not only confers "primary responsibility" for the maintenance of international peace and security on the Security Council, but also calls for "prompt and effective action" when a breach occurs. However, in our part of the world, we often ask ourselves where the "prompt and effective" action of the Council was when Rwanda was on fire. Where was the Council when Liberia was in turmoil? Where was the "prompt and effective action" when the people of Sierra Leone agonized under the yoke of a brutal dictatorship?

In the face of the selectivity of the Security Council in dealing with issues of international peace and security, and in spite of our region's meagre resources, we have had to rely on our own efforts to respond to internal strife in some of the countries in our neighbourhood. We call on the Governments of those countries to remain steadfast in making sacrifices and doing everything possible to bring about national reconciliation, peace and stability.

The international situation continues to be poisoned by unilateral economic, commercial and financial sanctions, which in some cases even have extraterritorial consequences.

We have seen such actions undermine the positive socio-economic gains made by Cuba over the last few decades, with the resultant deprivation of an entire population's human rights and dignity. The world stands to gain from a peaceful solution to the differences between the United States and Cuba, and we call on the United States to settle its differences with Cuba through negotiations on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

We are equally concerned by the effect of the imposition of sanctions by the Security Council against the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. However, we are extremely pleased with the recent developments concerning the possible trial of the two suspects in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie.

We call upon the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Netherlands to engage in discussions with the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, directly or through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to arrive at trial arrangements which will offer appropriate safety measures for the two suspects.

On Western Sahara, we call on the Security Council and the Secretary-General to continue their efforts for a peaceful and just solution to the persistent outstanding differences and for a free and fair referendum. We will not have a neighbouring African country recolonized by another African country.

Ghana shares the concerns and frustrations of the international community on the deadlock over the Middle East peace process. We believe that initiatives taken so far in support of the process, including the Madrid and the Oslo agreements, as well as the principle of land for peace, are an adequate basis for a just and long-lasting settlement. The international community is unanimous in its determination to see a just peace in the Middle East, and the Palestinian question no doubt holds the key.

My delegation's condemnation of all forms and manifestations of terrorism and mercenary practices is rooted no doubt in their tragic consequences on the political stability as well as the economic and social development of States. Terrorist acts, in particular, are totally unacceptable as a means of seeking redress for any grievance, achieving political ends or supporting a cause. It is in this connection that we have condemned the recent terrorist bomb attacks in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam that claimed hundreds of innocent lives, injured thousands of people and caused massive destruction to property, as well as the persistent threat to Americans around the world.

I am proud to say that since joining this Organization on 8 March 1957, only two days after acceding to independence, Ghana has remained true to its commitments to contribute to the promotion of international peace and security, the principal *raison d'être* of this Organization. Only three years after independence, in 1960, my country, Ghana, responded to the call of the Organization and committed troops and resources to the United Nations peacekeeping operation in what was then the Belgian Congo, now the Democratic People's Republic of the Congo.

We have since remained actively engaged, consistently participating in the peace efforts of the Organization, in all regions of the globe. As I speak, Ghana is listed as one of the major contributors of troops to United Nations peacekeeping efforts, with personnel serving in eight United Nations missions in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

The Government and people of Ghana are indeed proud of our participation in these international peace efforts, even though it has been at great expense to our developing country. It is not a sacrifice in material resources alone, but also in human terms, as Ghana, as well as her neighbours, has lost her sons and daughters in these operations.

We welcome the adoption last year of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. My country was among the large number that signed the Convention in Ottawa last December, and it is in the process of its early ratification. We hope that conditions will, in the not-too-distant future, permit the Convention's universal adoption, to enable us to rid our planet of these inhumane weapons which continue to kill and maim innocent civilians long after the conflicts in which they were laid. We are sincerely of the view that the international community should pay greater attention to demining and rehabilitation, because of the havoc that the presence of mines wreaks on the economies of the affected countries as well as on the contribution of millions of peasants towards the feeding of their families.

The United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, convened in Rome in June and July this year, is a welcome development in our collective effort to provide a legal and institutional framework to hold perpetrators accountable for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and serious violations of

international humanitarian law. It is our sincere hope that the spirit of compromise that led to the overwhelming endorsement of the Rome treaty will similarly be brought to bear on the work of the Preparatory Commission, to ensure the early establishment of a fully functional and effective court.

Once again Ghana has the unpleasant task of joining others to express concern at the financial situation that persists in the Organization, characterized by very little cash and huge arrears. The persistent critical financial situation places our Organization in jeopardy at this time of reform. It is regrettable that a number of States are neither paying their assessed contributions nor making full payment of their arrears, while some persistently aggravate the situation by attaching unreasonable as well as unacceptable conditions or benchmarks to the discharge of their Charter obligations. In this respect, let me admit that there are very small but extremely rich countries among us who could have helped without making a dent in their national wealth and resources.

Support for the United Nations must be demonstrated not in pious proclamations but in the willingness of all Member States to meet Charter obligations to the Organization, including payment of our contributions to ensure that the Organization is put on a sound financial footing to tackle its mandates and pressing commitments.

I wish to conclude by expressing once more my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General and to the Assembly for the comprehensive reforms being undertaken to restructure, revitalize and democratize the United Nations. I congratulate most sincerely the Secretary-General and the Assembly on their achievements so far. And I assure you that my delegation, my country, will continue to work with you in this reform process and in all aspects of the Organization's work in order to ensure that the Organization continues in the twenty-first century to better serve the global community and generations yet to come in the maintenance and enhancement of our collective security and the promotion of international cooperation to advance the economic and social well-being of all our peoples.

That happens to be the vision of the founding fathers of the United Nations. And this is our commitment.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Ghana for the statement he has just made.

Flight-Lieutenant (Rtd.) Jerry John Rawlings, President of the Republic of Ghana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Wolfgang Schüssel, President of the Council of the European Union and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria.

Mr. Schüssel (Austria): I have the honour and privilege to speak on behalf of the European Union. In this capacity I would like to extend my warm and sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. We are pleased that a distinguished Latin American statesman chairs our deliberations. I am confident that your experience, talent and energy will ensure a successful outcome for the work of our session.

I wish to express the high appreciation of the European Union for the outstanding leadership of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and for his excellent work at the helm of the United Nations. His "quiet revolution" of institutional reforms has our full support. We are looking forward to working with him to prepare the Millennium Assembly in the year 2000 in order to meet the challenges of human solidarity.

At the turn of the century, we live in a fascinating and challenging, but also difficult and complex, period of time, characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability. Local wars and ethnic conflicts have continued and new ones have broken out. "Peace processes" have had rather mixed success, and some show a distressing tendency to unravel. The threat from weapons of mass destruction is as alarming as ever. A majority of the Earth's population still lives in poverty. Enormous environmental disasters hit our planet all too often, and organized crime, illicit drug trafficking and terrorism are the plague of our time. Financial and economic crises of unprecedented dimensions do not spare any region — Asia and Russia being the most recent examples.

The impact of these phenomena is felt directly and immediately by every citizen in the world. Economies are more intertwined than ever, and information travels around the globe within seconds. No one can escape the forces of globalization, but all of us can join not only in confronting transnational threats but also in collecting the

fruits of globalization. The United Nations has a key part to play in this collective effort. Only our universal organization has the scope and legitimacy to generate the principles, norms and rules that are essential to harness the potential of globalization while managing its negative effects.

Today's turmoil in the financial markets can be dealt with only at a global level, addressing the political causes as well as the financial and economic aspects. It is imperative that industrial and developing countries elaborate a common strategy in a framework of international financial cooperation, including the G-22, and formulate standards and rules for financial transactions. What is needed now is leadership. Short-term remedies are not enough; long-term forward looking policies are required. We must invest in both sustainable growth and solidarity. As serious as the crisis is, there is every reason not to panic. The world economy is basically sound, with two thirds — 70 per cent — of the world's population living in growth zones. We sometimes forget that.

The European model of social market economy has served well to harness the forces of globalization. Respecting the interests and wishes of the people, showing solidarity for the poor and disadvantaged, promoting social partnership between employers and employees and combating unemployment by creating jobs and so on are intrinsic elements of a social market economy. We believe that this European model of a social market economy deserves serious consideration in our turbulent and complex age. To be honest, this is a kind of third way some are looking for.

Europe's answer to the challenges of globalization is two millennium projects which will shape the face of our continent: the introduction of the euro and the enlargement of the Union.

The single currency will improve the functioning of the internal market, help to secure employment and provide incentives for the market-oriented structural reforms needed to safeguard Europe's competitiveness. The creation of the euro has the potential to stabilize the international economic environment and to promote international trade. From the perspective of the world economy, this will be the most important effect of the single currency. Markets have already anticipated the introduction of the euro, as borne out by the monetary stability of the participating currencies, at a time when other countries and regions are experiencing severe financial crises. Consequently, the euro is creating a zone of stability and prosperity which will benefit the entire world economy.

The second millennium project, which has far-reaching consequences, is the enlargement of the European Union. We are convinced that the integration of our neighbours is the best way to safeguard lasting political stability and economic progress in Europe. Successful enlargement will bring a new dynamic to the Union and strengthen its role to the benefit of all the citizens of both Europe and the world. The process of enlarging the Union does not mean that the Union will become more inward-oriented or Eurocentric. On the contrary, we are convinced that the Union must continue to be outward- and forward-looking. Enlarging the European Union will go hand-in-hand with developing our traditional relations with countries and exporting stability around the world.

As President of the Council of the European Union, I would like to assure Members of the United Nations that an enlarged Union with a strong common currency will be a reliable and strong partner for the United Nations and the world.

I would like to stress the paramount interest of the European Union in the political and economic stability of Russia. We hope that the new Government of Russia will be able to re-establish confidence among the Russian people and the international financial community. We stand ready to cooperate further with the Russian authorities in support of sustained efforts towards stabilization and reform.

Let me now draw attention to a subject to which I attach the highest priority: the protection of the most vulnerable group in societies, our children. I am deeply convinced that a far-sighted policy, both internal and external, should be geared to the well-being of future generations. We, the statesmen, diplomats and decision makers of 185 nations, meeting in this Assembly, bear an enormous responsibility to formulate future-oriented policies in the service of young citizens on our planet. These include a fundamental principle. Our children must live childhood in peace, freedom, prosperity and security, free of abuse, violence and exploitation.

Millions of children and juveniles are exploited worldwide, their basic human rights denied in many ways. A global coalition must be forged to fight the abuse of children, in particular sexual exploitation, the despicable phenomenon of child soldiers and child labour.

The European Union supports the International Labour Organization draft convention on child labour. The involvement of children in armed conflict and its

disastrous consequences require particular attention and action by the international community. I call upon all States and parties to conflicts to respect existing international standards, to stop the use of children as combatants and to fully support the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu.

Sexual exploitation of children is one of the most abhorrent phenomena of our time. The European Union puts special emphasis on combating child prostitution and child pornography. This includes the spread of child pornography on the Internet. New information technologies create new challenges. But that is why, more than ever, we have to prohibit the production, dissemination and possession of child pornography in all its forms — print, audio, electronic media and video. Many countries have already enacted such legislation nationally. But only a worldwide ban on child pornography will be effective. In this context, we hope that the optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography can be finalized in the near future.

Legislative action has to be complemented by improved cooperation between national and international law enforcement and judicial authorities. I appeal to Governments, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and private business — including online services and Internet service providers — to join efforts in a crusade against child abuse. For every day we fail to do so, the innocent children of our world pay a terrible price.

Human rights, good and democratic governance and the rule of law have moved to centre stage in promoting peace, security and sustainable development. Respect for and promotion of human rights have become a crucial component of Union policies. They play a significant role in contractual relations with third countries, in development cooperation and in the common foreign and security policy.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the five-year implementation review of the Vienna Declaration should provide an opportunity for a critical assessment of the progress made by all States. The Council of the European Union, in commemorating this anniversary on 10 December this year in Vienna, will send a strong signal to further strengthen the United Nations human rights programme, in particular the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The European Union will continue to work towards the full integration of human rights, as well as a gender perspective, into all activities of the United Nations system. We hope that the adoption of the human rights defenders declaration will send a strong message of support to human rights activists worldwide. The European Union welcomes the progress on a draft protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and a draft protocol to the Convention against Torture. We hope that the respective Working Groups can complete their work next year.

I would like to stress our strong interest in cooperating with other Governments and civil society to improve the human rights situation in all parts of the world. To this end, the Union supports a wide range of projects and programmes in the field of human rights, the rule of law and electoral assistance. We will also work for the complete abolition of the death penalty. In the meantime, we shall call for a moratorium on all executions worldwide.

The international community is confronted with an increasing number of new and more diverse forms of conflict, which often turn violent. Apart from taking measures of operational prevention, which address the consequences of conflicts and range from preventive diplomacy to all forms of peaceful settlement of disputes and the preventive deployment of forces, we have to concentrate on the root causes, such as disrespect for minorities. We therefore need a pro-active policy, focusing on preventing the outbreak of violence at an early stage.

Early warning is a key element of a comprehensive strategy of conflict prevention and a prerequisite for any further action. Finally, post-conflict rehabilitation has to be more comprehensive and coordinated to address the wider issues of humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Union firmly supports United Nations efforts to strengthen its conflict-prevention and crisis-management capacity.

We are deeply committed to the primary role of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security and to the core functions of United Nations peacekeeping operations. This strong support is reflected in the facts: 4,500 troops and policemen from European Union countries serve in United Nations peacekeeping operations, which is one third of United Nations peacekeeping personnel; thousands more men and women from the European Union have served and are serving in United Nations-mandated operations such as the Stabilization Force in Bosnia; and our financial

contribution represents almost 40 per cent of the United Nations peacekeeping budget.

We welcome the increasingly multidimensional nature of peacekeeping operations, which poses new challenges to the average peacekeeper in the field. Peacekeeping today encompasses not only military tasks but a variety of other functions, such as civilian police activities, humanitarian assistance, demining, disarmament measures, demobilization, reintegration of former soldiers, enhancing and monitoring respect for human rights and, last but not least, public information. At United Nations Headquarters, this requires a strong Department of Peacekeeping Operations which is able to fulfil its functions effectively. In the wake of the decision by the General Assembly to reduce progressively the number of posts filled by personnel on loan, we strongly underline that the Department's expertise and gains of recent years must be retained.

The European Union is gravely concerned about the increasing security threat to United Nations personnel in the field, not least to unarmed military observers and civilian personnel. Bearing in mind the responsibility of the United Nations and Member States towards those participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations, we wish to recall the obligation of host countries and parties to conflicts to ensure the safety of these operations.

I would like to express our admiration and gratitude to all the men and women who serve under the banner of the United Nations in peace operations around the globe. They show remarkable courage, motivation and idealism. Likewise, I wish to express my deep sympathy to the families of United Nations personnel who have lost their lives in the service of peace.

The European Union attaches the utmost importance to progress in the areas of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation as a key element in the maintenance of peace and the strengthening of security. In this respect, the Union wishes to reiterate its deep concern about the grave threat to international peace and security posed by the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan in May this year. The Union has called on both countries to adhere to international non-proliferation regimes, in particular by signing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty as it stands. The Union strongly urges India and Pakistan to refrain from nuclear tests and from the development or deployment of nuclear weapons and nuclear-capable missiles. Likewise, we call on both countries to engage in a substantive dialogue with each other and to agree on confidence-building measures.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. We are committed to the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and welcome the recent ratifications by several countries. We call upon all States which have not yet done so to accede to it, without any change. The conclusion of a fissile material cut-off treaty will constitute a significant contribution to non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. We warmly welcome the fact that all impediments to starting such negotiations finally have been overcome, and we are looking forward to contributing to the substantive negotiations. We continue to believe that the systematic and progressive efforts by nuclear-weapon States to reduce nuclear weapons need to be intensified and pursued with determination.

Biological weapons pose grave dangers. It is shocking that they can also be produced by non-State actors. Therefore, the European Union gives priority to strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. We strive for the successful conclusion of the negotiations on a legally binding protocol establishing a verification and compliance regime in 1999. I would also like to underline our commitment to the universality and the full and effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, a landmark in the disarmament process.

The European Union reaffirms its commitment to the goal of totally eliminating anti-personnel landmines worldwide and welcomes the opening for signature of the Ottawa Convention. We are pleased that the number of signatories and ratifications is rising steadily and that the Convention will enter into force on 1 March 1999. The fact that the required number of 40 ratifications was reached so quickly underlines the importance that the international community attaches to this endeavour. The European Union, being the major donor to anti-mine activities, is contributing significantly to solving the problems caused by those weapons.

A serious challenge to the international community is raised by the combination of internal conflicts and the proliferation of small arms. This issue requires a multi-pronged response. The Union, for its part, has adopted a code of conduct on arms exports and has thereby set high common standards. Moreover, we are currently engaged in the implementation of the European Union programme for preventing and combating illicit trafficking in conventional arms. Under this programme, we will assist third countries in preventing and combating

illicit trafficking in arms, and we will also assist affected countries.

As we approach the new millennium, nearly a quarter of the world's people — foremost among them women and children — continue to live in absolute poverty, while almost a third more are very poor. While the blight of poverty thus continues to challenge the international community, recent decades have also shown that progress in the reduction of poverty is possible. The goal of poverty eradication, through sustained growth and economic and social development, must be placed at the centre of international development cooperation.

Poverty has many dimensions and needs to be tackled in a gender-sensitive and comprehensive way within the context of sustainable development, based on the interdependence and mutually reinforcing nature of economic development, social development and environmental protection. The European Union therefore attaches great importance to an integrated and coordinated follow-up to global conferences. While the first responsibility lies with Governments, the United Nations system, as the global framework for international cooperation, has a key role to play in supporting and coordinating national efforts.

A new global partnership between developing countries, developed countries, multilateral institutions and civil society, with emphasis put on local ownership and complementarity of efforts, must be forged in order to achieve people-centred sustainable development. The strong commitment of the Union to such a global partnership is based on its unique position as the world's largest provider of development assistance.

Among the various frameworks, the present Lomé Convention, which will expire in February 2000, remains essential. During the upcoming negotiations on a successor, the European Union will aim at strengthening its partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Building on the experience gained so far, the aim is to develop a modern and efficient framework for cooperation in order to keep the relationship between the Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries strong and prominent in the twenty-first century. I am convinced that cooperation in the context of the Lomé Convention will make an effective contribution to eradicating poverty and integrating the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries into our worldwide economic system.

We are committed to sustainable development as the overarching principle of national policy and international cooperation in our policies. Recognizing the central role of a healthy environment in quality of life, the European Union attaches great importance to reform of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT). We would welcome more coordination, focus and efficiency in these areas. The Kyoto Protocol, in which the member States of the European Union committed themselves to a reduction of 8 per cent in greenhouse gases, constitutes an important step towards sustainable development. As developed countries, we are prepared to take the lead in combating climate change. The European Community and its member States are determined to translate the commitments made at Kyoto into concrete actions and achievements.

In the context of sustainable development, population issues are of particular concern. They directly relate to human health and the quality of life. Over the coming decades, population size and age structure will be important factors interacting with economic development and the environment in all parts of the world. It is therefore very timely that a special session of the General Assembly will be convened next year to review and appraise the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994.

The fight against drugs is a major priority in the policy of the European Union. The recent special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem was an important step in the international effort to counter the global scourge of drug abuse. I should like to pay tribute to the Executive Director of the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), Pino Arlacchi, and all others involved, for the excellent preparation of the session. Political leaders unanimously endorsed a series of important documents, including a Political Declaration, several action plans, time-frames and a number of concrete measures.

We welcome the balanced, integrated and gender-sensitive anti-drug strategy adopted by the special session. Our new commitments embrace efforts on both the supply and the demand side, constituting equal parameters of the drug-control equation. In particular, we look forward to the elaboration of an operational action programme on demand reduction. We from the European Union fully support an effective and rapid follow-up and implementation programme of the outcome of the special session.

In the light of the important new and extensive mandates in the field of international drug control, the donor base of UNDCP must be broadened. The European Union will continue to support the valuable work of UNDCP, the international lead agency in the follow-up to the special session.

The fight against organized crime — and the work of the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention — is of foremost importance. In this context we welcome closer cooperation between UNDCP and the Crime Prevention Centre in order to enhance the synergy of these programmes. The danger which transnational organized crime poses to the world community by creeping into many aspects of our societies must be met by effective international measures. Therefore, we support the elaboration of a convention against transnational organized crime and are pleased about the constructive and productive spirit of the preparatory meeting in Buenos Aires.

The horrible bomb attacks in Africa and Northern Ireland have brought terrorism back to the forefront of international concern. The General Assembly, setting norms and standards for the fight against terrorism, has passed a number of resolutions and adopted no fewer than 11 anti-terrorism conventions. The Sixth Committee is currently negotiating a convention on the suppression of acts of nuclear terrorism. Its early finalization would signal the determination of the international community to relentlessly pursue terrorists. Only through concerted action can we win the battle against terrorists. The more countries join in this effort, the fewer the safe havens where terrorists can run or hide.

The successful completion of the Conference for the establishment of an International Criminal Court is an achievement of historic dimensions. The European Union fully endorses the outcome of the Rome Conference and the Statute, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority of participating States. This Statute lays the foundation for an effective and credible Court as an institution to fight impunity for the most heinous crimes and to deter, once and for all, their commission, thereby contributing to the global advancement of peace and democracy. This session of the General Assembly must adopt the appropriate decisions to make the Court a reality. The European Union stands ready to do its utmost to contribute to the accomplishment of these tasks.

As in the past, the European Union describes its relations with third countries, and its position on areas of conflict throughout the world, in a memorandum that is circulated as an integral part of this address. The memorandum is a useful compendium of the common foreign and security policy of the Union and of relevant Community policies. I will highlight just a few positions.

We are extremely concerned at the dramatic escalation of tension in Kosovo. Hundreds of people have been killed, more than 250,000 refugees have been forced to leave their homes as a result of armed clashes, and the threat of a humanitarian catastrophe is becoming ever more real. The primary responsibility for the devastating situation rests with the Serb and Yugoslav authorities, since their police and military operations have led to consequences for the civilian population that are out of any justifiable proportion. Therefore, it is up to President Slobodan Milosevic to order a halt to all repressive actions against the civilian population in Kosovo. At the same time, the Union expects that all parties concerned reject all forms of violence.

The Union, together with humanitarian organizations, has started a series of projects in order to create favourable conditions for a return process for refugees before the winter comes. A complete cessation of armed activities and a progressive withdrawal of Serb forces is needed now to make people confident enough to return to their homes. The European Union urges the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia authorities to allow unimpeded access to all areas of Kosovo for humanitarian organizations and observers and international forensic experts.

Negotiations between both sides, with international involvement, should take place as soon as possible to agree upon confidence-building measures and to define a new status for Kosovo. However, without a cessation of the ongoing Serb offensive, an end to further bloodshed and a significant improvement of the catastrophic humanitarian situation, a meaningful dialogue cannot be started. The European Union hopes that progress towards democracy, which is a prerequisite for the resolution of the conflict, can be achieved in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The final objective of the reform process should be the full integration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into the international community.

The Union remains fully committed to the implementation of the Dayton Accords, to political and economic stabilization, the return of refugees and the strengthening of civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The past year has seen substantial progress due to strong pressure by the international community. We hope that the recent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina will

contribute to the reconciliation of the ethnic communities and to the construction of a new civil society.

With regard to Albania, the European Union is seriously concerned at the recent outbreak of violence following the assassination of a leading politician of an opposition party. The European Union calls on all Albanian political parties to adopt a constructive attitude to solving the crisis by peaceful means through political consultations. It urges the parties to renounce any strategy of confrontation and to avoid fighting and violent demonstrations. Further violence will make national reconciliation even more difficult.

We sincerely hope that the instability still widespread in Albania will soon be overcome, in particular by overcoming the current political difficulties caused by hatred, mutual mistrust and various actions by both the Government and the main opposition party. The Union reminds all political factions of their obligation not to deepen the political divide, but rather to develop a spirit of cooperation.

The Union will continue its assistance according to progress made in the political dialogue as well as in the stabilization of institutions, especially in the field of police action.

The European Union stresses once again that the status quo in Cyprus is not acceptable. It reaffirms its strong support for the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative aimed at a negotiated and lasting solution to the Cyprus question, respecting the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity of the country in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, with the goal of a bizonal, bicommunal federation on Cyprus.

The Union started accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus on 31 March of this year. The accession process and progress towards a political solution should reinforce one another. Accession to the Union should benefit all communities and help to bring about peace and reconciliation on the island.

In this context, we welcome the appointment of the new United Nations Deputy Special Representative, Dame Ann Hercus.

The European Union remains deeply concerned at the continuing standstill in the Middle East peace process, which constitutes a threat to the stability of the region. The Union considers the Middle East peace process to be the only path to security and peace for Israel, the Palestinians and the neighbouring States. A just and durable solution is in the fundamental interest of the European Union.

Our approach was reaffirmed at the meeting of the European Council held in Cardiff in June 1998. We contribute actively to efforts to promote the peace process, providing not only substantial economic support but also adding our political weight to the search for a solution. It is of the utmost importance to restore trust and confidence between the parties. The pillars of a solution continue to be in the principles agreed at Madrid and Oslo, especially land for peace, the full implementation of existing commitments of the Israeli/Palestinian Interim Agreement and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We call on Israel to recognize the right of the Palestinians to self-determination without excluding the option of a state of their own. On the other side, we call upon the Palestinians to reaffirm their commitment to Israel's right to live within recognized and safe borders. We also reiterate our opposition to Israeli settlements in occupied Arab territories and to other unilateral measures, such as the changing of the status of Jerusalem. More than any other issues, such acts, as well as the continued expansion of settlements, undermine the Palestinians' confidence in the peace process.

The European Union will continue to provide assistance to the Palestinian people. The positive development of the Palestinian economy is a precondition for political stability.

We want to express our concern at the lack of progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, and we underline the need for a continuing effort in order to achieve a solution.

The Union supports the efforts of the United States to relaunch the negotiations. We consider that every avenue should be explored in order to restore a spirit of mutual trust and constructive negotiations. In this respect, we think that the recent proposals put forward by France and Egypt, as well as by our European Union Special Envoy, should be studied positively.

Africa, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, stands at the crossroads once more. In his landmark report (A/52/871) entitled "The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa", Secretary-General Kofi Annan provided us with a clear analysis and a framework for a

comprehensive policy. The European Union is deeply concerned about the terrible toll that recent and current conflicts have taken, especially on innocent civilians. In spite of important regional and subregional efforts, the instability appears to be spreading, and creating a downward spiral that simply has to be stopped. I therefore urge the international community to continue to complement African efforts to solve their problems, as it has done by establishing the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA) and the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL). The Union would welcome further development of regional and subregional cooperation and integration among African countries. We hope that the summit between the European Union and the Southern African Development Community in Vienna in November will make an important contribution.

The Secretary-General's report rightly focuses on the importance of creating an environment in which durable peace is sustained and economic growth promoted. Recognizing that peace and security are indispensable preconditions, we emphasize the need for good governance, including respect for human rights and the rule of law. These values are essential pillars of the European Union's development policy, which over several decades has been centred on a genuine partnership with Africa.

The European Union is particularly concerned about the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the wider dangers for the region as a whole from the escalation of the conflict. In this respect, we hope that the European Union Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, Mr. Aldo Ajello, will continue to work together with the representatives of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

We urge all the parties involved in the conflict of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to respect human rights and humanitarian law and to abstain from acts of violence against civilians. We welcome African initiatives to find a peaceful solution to this conflict, which can be solved only through a negotiated settlement acceptable to all Congolese. This would allow the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries of the region to find the peace and stability that are prerequisites for their development. The Union remains ready to help this political dialogue and to support any negotiation scheme obtaining the consent of all parties involved, *inter alia*, through the assistance of our Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region. A regional conference could be useful at a later stage to consider the relevant aspects and to strengthen regional cooperation.

We are determined to play an effective role in efforts to stop the fighting and restore peace, stability and respect for human rights in Afghanistan. We are committed to bringing about a sustainable peace in Afghanistan, putting an end to foreign intervention, and encouraging intra-Afghan dialogue, in particular through support for the central role of the United Nations. The European Union attaches special importance to the fight against illegal drugs and terrorism in Afghanistan.

We remain gravely concerned at the persistent human rights violations and breaches of humanitarian law in Afghanistan. We denounce the continuing discrimination against girls and women in that country. We strongly urge all factions, and in particular the Taliban, to recognize, protect and promote human rights. And we strongly urge them to end discriminatory policies and to recognize, protect and promote equal rights and dignity for men and women.

Non-governmental organizations will be able to return to Kabul only when the authorities in Afghanistan have met the necessary conditions.

We reiterate our strong concern for the security of United Nations personnel, other related personnel and personnel of non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan, and we recall the responsibility of all factions to ensure safety, security and freedom of movement. We condemn the recent attack against two staff members of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) and the killing of Iranian diplomats in northern Afghanistan, and we demand an urgent investigation into these atrocious acts. We call on the Taliban to cooperate fully in ensuring the safe release of the remaining diplomats and other Iranian nationals missing in Afghanistan.

We have been deeply involved in the electoral process in Cambodia, especially in voter registration and poll observation, dispatching some 200 election observers who cooperated exceptionally well with the United Nations and other observer groups in the Joint International Observer Group.

We call upon all political forces in Cambodia to seize this opportunity to work together, to the fullest extent possible, towards national reconciliation, and express the hope that, with the elections, the foundation for the future well-being and prosperity of the people of Cambodia has been laid. Return to political normalcy will encourage the Union to consider new assistance programmes to help Cambodia in its economic recovery.

The Union notes with satisfaction the results achieved at the August meeting in New York, under the auspices of Mr. Kofi Annan, between the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal on the question of East Timor. We commend the Secretary-General and his Personal Representative for their efforts in this regard.

We welcome the Ministers' agreement to enter into in-depth negotiations on issues related to the question of East Timor, addressed in the final communiqué of the meeting, without prejudice to their basic positions of principle. We hope that these negotiations will lead to a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution in the near future, respecting the rights and legitimate aspirations of the people, in accordance with the resolutions of the General Assembly and with the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. We welcome the prospect of the closer involvement of the East Timorese in the search for a solution.

I am deeply concerned at the continuing violations of human rights and lack of progress towards democracy in Burma/Myanmar. We strongly deplore the repressive actions of the Burmese authorities, including the arrest of several hundred members of the opposition. We call upon the State Peace and Development Council once again to bring human rights violations to an end and to enter into a substantive dialogue with opposition leaders, especially and including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of ethnic minorities, in order to establish democratic rule in accordance with the will of the people as expressed in democratic elections held in 1990. The Union seeks to cooperate closely with other countries, in particular in the region, to resolve the worrying situation in the country.

Although the challenges of the twenty-first century will be different from those we have been used to dealing with in past decades, we are convinced that the United Nations will become more indispensable than ever as the forum for global cooperation. What we have to do now is to make our world Organization fit for the next century. The Secretary-General's reform programme is excellent.

The reform of our world Organization is in the interest of all Member States. Of course, reform is not a cost-cutting exercise alone, but an ongoing process which will ultimately lead to a substantial improvement of the work done in the United Nations family. This process will help the Organization to better focus on the fulfilment of mandates and on the improvement of programme delivery. Consequently, the European Union will continue vigorously to support reform based on the proposals of the Secretary-General and the decisions of the General Assembly.

As far as the organization and methods of work of intergovernmental bodies are concerned, and especially of the General Assembly, we attach particular importance to the implementation of the reforms already agreed upon. We would welcome further improvements, particularly the streamlining of agendas, the reduction of duplication and better coordination between bodies dealing with similar issues.

The European Union firmly believes that the General Assembly should concentrate on implementing the significant agreements reached in some working groups of the General Assembly and at the major United Nations conferences. Carefully wrought compromises that allowed adoption by consensus were the result of a great amount of time and energy invested by all Member States.

The European Union is firmly committed to finding solutions to the United Nations financial crisis. Continuing high levels of unpaid assessments are undermining the financial stability and liquidity, and therefore the purpose and goal, of the United Nations. This places a heavy and unfair burden upon troop-contributing countries. The member States of the European Union have consistently honoured their financial obligations towards the United Nations. They pay their contributions in full, on time and without conditions. A sound financial basis requires that all Member States fulfil their Charter obligations. The United States cannot be exempt from such obligations.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, the United States has a special responsibility towards the United Nations. We express our sincere hope that Washington will soon settle its arrears and live up to the legitimate expectations of Member States of the United States' role in the world Organization.

The European Union has grown from 100 million people to 400 million today. With only 8 per cent of the world population, the Union provides for 60 per cent of development and 50 per cent of humanitarian assistance. Eighty per cent of international aid to Russia and the republics of the former Soviet Union, and 50 per cent of the assistance to the Palestinian territories are paid by the European Union. Forty per cent of the reconstruction help to Bosnia and Herzegovina come from the member States of the European Union. We are the strongest supporter of the United Nations. Our contributions account for 36 per cent of the regular budget and 39 per cent of the peacekeeping budget. The Union is ready to

use its political weight for the benefit of the entire international community, in particular developing countries.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the European Union's deep commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. We will continue to support strongly the United Nations and the Secretary-General in carrying out the key objectives: the maintenance of international peace and security, economic and social progress, and the promotion of human rights and democratic freedoms.

The message of the European Union to the United Nations is clear. At the threshold of the new millennium, we face common threats and challenges. We must join forces to harness the benefits and diminish the risks of globalization. We must form a global alliance for human security. Global cooperation, as understood by the European Union, means human solidarity to ensure the survival of our planet and safeguard the future of coming generations.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on the Vice Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, His Excellency Mr. Klaus Kinkel.

Mr. Kinkel (Germany) (*spoke in German; interpretation furnished by the delegation*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election. I wish you good fortune and all of us a successful session.

I should also like to thank Ambassador Udovenko for the dedicated way he conducted the business of the fifty-second session. He advanced the reform process at the United Nations and kept it on the agenda. We can and must follow up these efforts.

This session of the General Assembly has a special significance for my country. It was 25 years ago, almost to the day, on 19 September 1973, that Walter Scheel became the first Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany to address the United Nations. When he described our perception of the United Nations, he said that it meant more than the mere security of States, more than the mere regulation of their diplomatic relations. He said that what it is all about is the beginning and the objective of any rational policy — people.

That description of our role in the United Nations remains valid. United Germany too feels committed to a world free from fear and want, protected by the rule of law, a world in which every individual has his opportunity and which preserves the integrity of Creation for future generations. It is the vision enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights.

We have come a lot closer to that vision over the past 25 years. The division of Germany, Europe and the world has been healed. The world is developing ever more into the "one world" on the foundations of democracy and human rights. But it is also becoming increasingly clear that the human race has never been so bound up together in its common destiny, united by common challenges, as it is today.

The crises in Russia and Asia have shaken the world economy. The global scourges of drugs, organized crime and terrorism spread their tentacles around the globe. The year 1998 is the year of climate disasters. Two thirds of Bangladesh is under water and the Yangtze floods in China have claimed thousands of lives.

No State, whether super-Power or small island State, can master these global challenges alone. And no one can escape them, least of all the suffering people: the homeless in Bangladesh, the drug addict in Europe, the victim of civil war in Africa.

We can shape our future only through joint efforts. We therefore need global action and global management for the global challenges of the twenty-first century; not tomorrow or the day after, but today.

This is a test not only for Governments but also for the other global players: the non-governmental organizations and the multinational corporations. Never were the non-governmental organizations so important as they are today. Without them the Ottawa Convention banning landmines could not have been signed in December 1997. And, let us not forget, 51 of the world's hundred largest economic entities are now companies, and only 49 of them States. All this shows that the time has come for new alliances for peace, freedom and prosperity throughout the world.

The age of globalization is the age of the United Nations. Only here do all nations of the world come together. Only here can we find joint solutions to the global challenges of today and tomorrow. This is why we Germans want to help get the United Nations in shape for the twenty-first century. We are facing up to this responsibility — as the second largest export nation and the third largest economy in the world, and as the country with the largest population in the European Union.

We owe Secretary-General Kofi Annan our gratitude and support for his reform proposals. Now it is up to the Member States. The Security Council still mirrors the world as it was at the end of the Second World War, but not the enhanced status of Asia, Africa and Latin America with the Caribbean.

The same is true of the greater weight of Japan and united Germany. I wish to thank all Member States that advocate a permanent seat for Germany on the Security Council. Security Council reform cannot be delayed any longer; otherwise, the momentum will be lost and that would be bad indeed.

Since the ending of the cold war the United Nations has had more burdens to shoulder than ever. It therefore needs effective institutions, and for this reason it has a right to expect members to pay their dues on time. All, and especially the big members, must help according to their ability to ensure that the world Organization can accomplish its tasks. Germany, the third largest contributor, will continue to meet its obligations.

We know from recent experience that we should not add to but rather ease the burden of the United Nations. This is a task especially for regional organizations like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). If they succeed in settling conflicts locally, the Security Council will not need to deal with them. I think that would be very well-advised, because it would free capacities for all of us.

New avenues of joint action are therefore called for. To pretend globalization is not happening would be absurd. Only those who face up to the challenge can exploit the opportunities and cushion the risks.

The impact of the crises in Russia and Asia shows that the world economy needs a reliable framework. That is not to say we need a global financial authority or fixed exchange rates, least of all a new wave of protectionism. But we do need better early-warning mechanisms, more transparency and more efficient banking systems, especially in the newly emerging economies.

This is not a task for Governments alone. What is needed now is a global public-private partnership between Governments, international financial organizations and corporations. We therefore support the American initiative for a dialogue between the G-8 and the newly emerging economies on a new international financial architecture. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank should not always have to serve as the stopgap when the opportunity for structural reforms has been missed.

Managing globalization also means weaving a network of partnerships between the big regional groupings and the big countries. The regional groupings are the components of a new global order under the roof of the United Nations. The European Union's partnerships with regional organizations like the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) prove we are on the right course: We want an open, not a confrontational, kind of regionalism.

I am confident that the European Union will be an anchor of stability in the twenty-first century. By introducing a single currency on 1 January 1999, it is focusing its energies. Its global role will increase. It is about to begin further negotiations on accession with associated partners. What Willy Brandt said about Germany in 1989 applies today to the whole of Europe:

"What belongs together is now growing together".

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) too is also gradually opening its doors to the new democracies. In the year of its fiftieth anniversary it will admit Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Together with Russia, Ukraine and the other Commonwealth of Independent States members, we are developing a comprehensive security partnership.

True, the Russians are having a rough time at present, but the world needs a democratic and stable Russia, a Russia which will play the role commensurate with its size, its status and its potential. Russia faces a Herculean task of consolidating the economy and maintaining social stability. All those responsible must face up to the challenge: the President, the Government, the parties and business. Of course, the regions too are called upon.

I know from my talks with Prime Minister Primakov last week in Moscow that Russia intends neither to change course nor to go into reverse. The crisis in Russia affects us all. We will not abandon Russia. It can count on us.

The Kosovo conflict remains a thorn in Europe's side. A humanitarian disaster in the true sense of the word is looming. The situation of the refugees, more

than 250,000 of them, is desperate. International organizations, the European Union, the United States and Russia are coordinating their efforts to enable those who have been driven out to return to their villages.

Time is getting short; winter is just around the corner. Most of the responsibility for this drama lies with Belgrade, with President Milosevic. He must realize that the international community will react with military force if necessary. We still seek a political solution for Kosovo — self-administration within the Yugoslav Federation. However, this cannot be achieved without Belgrade and Pristina. So the weapons must now be silenced. We condemn the use of force by the Yugoslav security forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army. The recent reports we have received from Kosovo are very disappointing, troubling and worrisome. I hope they are not true.

NATO is prepared to provide the backing for a political solution. Yugoslavia and Kosovo are a part of Europe. Their future can only be a European one. The history of Europe in this century shows that we can overcome hatred and mistrust. But we have to have the willingness to do so.

In Bosnia, too, we have seen animosity slowly being replaced by trust and cooperation. Recently I paid my twelfth visit to Sarajevo. That tormented city is slowly beginning to blossom again, and the country's reconstruction is progressing.

Nonetheless, the peace process must continue to be buttressed by NATO and the Stabilization Force (SFOR), for the process is not self-sustaining. Regardless of the result of the elections, the international community will not tolerate any reversal of the implementation of the peace agreement. Furthermore, genuine peace will not return until the presumed war criminals and enemies of peace — Mr. Karadzic and his lot — have been brought to trial in The Hague.

Only when those guilty of crimes against humanity, torturers and terrorists all over the world, have been brought to justice will we all be able to sleep peacefully.

Thus, the establishment of the International Criminal Court on 17 July as a major step towards a world order in which the force of law, not the law of force, prevails. Germany was the driving force. I appeal to all countries to sign and ratify the Court's Statute.

No one stands more at the mercy of those who wield power than refugees. At present more than 20 million people worldwide are in flight: despairing elderly people, women, children; people who are sick, homeless and destitute and have absolutely no idea what is going to happen to them.

Over the last several years I have been to many refugee camps, in Albania, Africa and the Middle East. Every refugee's case is a story of immeasurable human suffering.

Germany is now the country with the second largest number of refugees. From Kosovo alone, 150,000 refugees have found refuge in Germany.

The suffering of the refugees is a humanitarian and political challenge to the international community as a whole. What is now needed, therefore, is a global refugee policy. The United Nations, too, has to do something about it.

Specifically, this means, first, a more equitable distribution of the refugees, as I recommended here in the General Assembly in 1993. We cannot leave the poorest countries to their own devices in trying to cope with the refugee problem.

Secondly, greater efforts will have to be made to remove the causes of flight and expulsion.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has declared the twenty-first century a century of prevention, and with good reason. To wait until a situation gets so bad that people have to take flight is to make oneself partly responsible. Trouble must therefore be nipped in the bud. This is the task of preventive diplomacy, of human rights observers and peacekeeping forces.

Striking at the root of mass flight and migration also means eliminating the economic, ecological and social causes. The gap between rich and poor grows wider. The wealthiest 20 per cent of the world population consume 86 per cent of all goods, the poorest 20 per cent only 1.3 per cent.

This equity gap must be closed. Every individual has a right to live in dignity, free from hunger and want.

All nations must be given a fair chance in global competition, the poorest ones in particular. Hence, it is up to the rich countries to help the poor make the most of their opportunities for development.

Our aim is a social world market economy. This is why in 1997 Germany spent 10.25 billion deutsche marks on bilateral and multilateral assistance measures — an investment in peace and stability.

Africa shows what can be achieved when the international community and the countries concerned pull together. Today, democratic elections are held in more than half of the African countries. In 20 African countries economic growth is between 4 and 6 per cent, and in 11 it is higher still.

We want the Africans to know that we will not abandon that vast continent and its 800 million people, despite the heavy burdens it still has to bear.

Poverty and refugee problems are also exacerbating the situation in the Middle East. The people in Israel and in the Palestinian territories long for peace more than anything else on earth. The peace process requires fresh impetus.

The Israelis and Palestinians must move towards each other again and rediscover the lost mutual trust.

We Europeans will continue to support this process with our American friends. We back Israel's legitimate claim to security for its State and citizens.

The Palestinians have recognized that claim; now words must be followed by deeds. They must see to it that terrorism has no chance.

But Israel, too, must show compromise as regards a further partial withdrawal. Neither side should put any new obstacles in the way of a deal — and that includes allowing new settlements in the occupied territories.

Particularly in the Middle East, we have time and again seen that terrorism leads to a dead end, destruction and suffering. We must pit all our strength against the cynics who advocate violence, the fanatics and ideologues; the dead of Omagh, Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam serve as a warning. Those who plant bombs and murder people must be brought to justice.

Drying up the sources of terrorism — poverty, ethnic conflict and fundamentalism — is our common responsibility. But to fight terrorism is not to fight Islam. Islam is one of the great world religions. Nothing could be further from the truth than the cliché that Islam is synonymous with fundamentalism and violations of human rights.

We want a dialogue of cultures and religions, especially with Islam. There exists an ethic of humanity that unites us all. This ethic is based on the inalienable dignity of every individual, as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the human rights covenants of the United Nations. These are the benchmarks for our joint action in the twenty-first century.

Violations of human rights are no longer an internal matter of States. They concern us all. Any group which, like the regime in Kabul, denies women their basic human rights places itself outside the international community of common values.

The world of tomorrow will be judged by how we treat our children today. They are our most valuable asset. Yet the rights of many children are still being trampled underfoot. Millions of children have no chance to live a life in dignity. Millions of children are forced to work.

Particularly appalling is the fact that every year some two million children all over the world are sexually abused. Only through joint action can we stop child prostitution, traffic in children and child pornography, including that proliferated via the Internet. I therefore propose that the United Nations set up a contact point to coordinate worldwide efforts to eradicate sexual abuse of children. The optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child designed to afford better protection against sexual exploitation should be quickly adopted and quickly put into effect.

Children are small people who need big rights. Protection for children during armed conflicts must be improved, including by outlawing their use as soldiers.

We all hoped that with the ending of the East-West confrontation the danger of a nuclear conflagration would be gone forever. This has proved to be an illusion. The threat of proliferation of means of mass destruction hovers over the human race. We can safeguard world peace in the twenty-first century only if we keep such terrible weapons under control.

In Geneva, India and Pakistan have agreed to negotiations on a cut-off. That's a good sign, but not nearly enough. It must be followed by their accession to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. And all nations should now sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This also applies to the conventions banning

chemical and biological weapons. The adoption of a verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention is now urgent.

Next March the Ottawa Convention imposing a worldwide ban on anti-personnel landmines enters into force — a great success. Only if all countries now sign the Convention will these diabolical devices soon be wiped from the face of the earth. It is our common task to get rid of the 100 million mines still remaining, using state-of-the-art technology.

We must also radically rethink our attitude to nature. The victims of the floods in China and Bangladesh are a warning. We must swing the wheel round now. This we owe to our children and grandchildren. We can save our blue planet and its ecosystem together or not at all.

Take the world climate. The Kyoto Protocol launched a global effort to protect it. That was a big step forward. But time is getting short. We have just had the warmest half year this century. At the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, scheduled for Buenos Aires in November, we shall have to agree on the instruments with which to achieve the objectives of Kyoto.

Take water. Water is irreplaceable. Water is more important than oil. Yet in more than 80 countries it is in short supply. Two billion people have insufficient access or none at all to clean drinking water. Finding joint solutions for the peaceful use and conservation of water, the source of life, is one of the great tasks of the twenty-first century. The pursuit of this scarce commodity must not be allowed to spark fresh conflicts.

Germany intends to remain in the vanguard of the international campaign to protect the environment. I am gratified to note that our commitment has been acknowledged by the appointment of Klaus Töpfer as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

But we are not going to rest on our laurels. A few days ago I opened an international conference in Potsdam on early-warning mechanisms for natural disasters. The conference has shown that progress can be achieved if we want it. Specifically, it is now a question of establishing effective global early-warning systems for environmental crises and natural disasters, and developing emergency management arrangements for the coordination of international relief measures. We must now get down to this task, and the United Nations is the right place to do so.

Four hundred and sixty three days from now the twentieth century comes to an end — a century of unprecedented violence and destruction. The coming century must be a century with a humane countenance. What a wonderful vision. But talking about it is not enough. Only if we act together will we survive together.

The United Nations is indispensable to this task. Strengthening it to secure a peaceful and more equitable world — that is our responsibility. This we owe to coming generations. My country will devote every possible effort to this task.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Igor Ivanov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Ivanov (Russian Federation) *(interpretation from Russian)*: Mankind is increasingly feeling the winds of the twenty-first century. What they bring depends on all of us, on whether or not we succeed in responding collectively to new challenges and in establishing a reliable system of international security and stability once we have overcome the vices, antagonisms and stereotypes accumulated during the century about to end.

This is not only possible, it is the imperative of our times!

A well-known Russian proverb says, "If you would live in the world, live in peace". It contains a highly philosophical message of everlasting value. Mankind will live in peace and harmony once it has learned to resolve emerging problems through peaceful, political means. States will live in peace and harmony once they have recognized their interrelationship and interdependence and started to seek collective responses to the challenges of their times.

Experience confirms the truth of this popular wisdom. The most recent example is the sharp aggravation of the world monetary and financial crisis which has besieged many countries, including Russia, which is undergoing sweeping economic reforms. The current upheaval in the world financial markets can be overcome only by joint efforts that do not pursue unilateral advantages and are intended to ensure global economic stability. Interaction of States in this process, including within the framework of the United Nations, must, on principle, be raised to a new level.

As for Russia, after overcoming an acute political crisis, the country's President, Boris N. Yeltsin, the Government and the leading political forces are making vigorous efforts to stabilize the economic and financial situation. This is not an easy task, but the solution will be found.

From this rostrum I pledge that Russia will not deviate from the path of reform and will do its best to pass with dignity this most difficult test, so as not only to preserve the democratic progress that has been made but also to augment it.

Likewise, Russia's foreign policy will remain consistent and constructive. It is firmly geared towards building a democratic multipolar world, ensuring interaction with other States in the interests of settling international problems by political means and developing broad, mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas.

We are convinced that the problems before the world, no matter how complex they may be, can be solved on the basis of strict observance of international law and close interaction among States. Multilateral organizations and mechanisms have a special role to play in this respect. Above all, this applies to the United Nations, which continues to be the sole universal international peacekeeping organization and is thus better equipped than any other world body to reach agreements on how to settle conflicts, as well as to identify and remove the underlying social and economic causes. It is important for United Nations efforts to be reinforced by support from regional organizations.

We highly value the level of interaction that now exists between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), acting as a reliable partner in addressing complex European problems, as well as interaction with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other regional organizations, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The international community has developed a unique arsenal of political and diplomatic tools intended for the resolution of every international problem. It must be put to effective use.

Coercive actions constitute exceptional methods of last resort. Their use must be strictly regulated by the rules of international law and above all by the United Nations Charter. In other words, we advocate invoking the force of law rather than the law of force in international affairs.

The fact that the Iraqi crisis which erupted earlier this year was settled precisely by political means, through the joint efforts of many States and the initiatives launched by the United Nations Secretary-General, provided graphic evidence that the potential inherent in constructive and active diplomacy is by far more efficient than relying exclusively on military force.

A new outbreak of tensions around Iraq has made us deeply concerned, since it is fraught with serious consequences for regional and international stability. No doubt Iraq must fully travel its part of the road, resume full cooperation with the United Nations Special Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and implement relevant Security Council resolutions. On the other hand, the Security Council must adequately assess the situation related to the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and answer the question of whether or not that country still poses a threat to regional and overall international security after seven years of work carried out there by United Nations inspectors. Concerted action by the world community is required today to finally unblock this crisis situation.

Political logic must prevail over the logic of force in our search for ways to settle the explosive conflict in Kosovo. The use of tools of coercion to resolve the Kosovo conflict might lead to a major war with unpredictable consequences for the Balkan region and Europe at large. It is our firm belief that a political solution is the only possible way of settling the problem of Kosovo, granting it broad autonomy and ensuring strict respect for the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The bloodshed in Afghanistan continues in spite of the fact that, as experience has shown, only temporary gains can be obtained in that country through the use of arms. Rather, it is only through a persistent search for political solutions, with the United Nations playing a central role, that genuine stabilization, real settlement, formation of an efficient central Government recognized by all Afghans and, finally, assurance of Afghanistan's territorial integrity and independence can realistically be accomplished.

Collective political efforts are required to give a second wind to the Middle East peace process. In our view, it is not so much the absence of fresh ideas or proposals but rather the upsetting of the balance that has stymied progress on all the negotiating tracks. It should not be ignored that even if the Middle East process has long-term objectives, it also has its time limits. Russia has consistently advocated the establishment of an independent Palestinian State through political means and

negotiations. It is only in this way that the inalienable rights of the Palestinians to self-determination and reliable assurance of Israel's legitimate security interests can be realized.

In a parallel move, talks must be resumed on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, building on the results already achieved.

The recently proposed settlement of the Lockerbie case has been a major accomplishment of the international community. The adoption by the Security Council of a relevant resolution was possible due to the constructive approach taken by the parties concerned — the United States, Great Britain, France and Libya — as well as due to diplomatic efforts by many international organizations, which were supported by Russia. It is essential to proceed without delay to its implementation.

Arguably, similar perseverance must be shown in the efforts to break the deadlock in the Cyprus settlement. The United Nations must play a leading role to this end.

Failure of the international community to fully extinguish any one of the long-standing local conflicts in Africa in recent years is a source of growing concern. Moreover, new flash points of tension have emerged on that continent. It must be admitted that so far attempts to achieve full coordination between the United Nations and Africa's regional organizations have not succeeded. That is why the upcoming Security Council ministerial meeting on Africa should focus on shaping a strong common stance capable of radically reversing the negative dynamics of Africa's latest developments.

For objective reasons, Russia has paid special attention to settlement of conflict situations in the CIS. Whether in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan or Trans-Dniestria, our country has but one objective — namely, promoting a political settlement and helping build lasting peace. As requested by the sides concerned, Russia has undertaken a difficult peace-building mission and is doing all it can to bring it to fruition. But the effort can prove unavailing unless the parties in conflict show goodwill and a constructive attitude and also receive more meaningful international backing, above all from the United Nations and the OSCE.

While making strong efforts to settle regional crises, we should not lose sight of global problems, some of which have acquired a new dimension in the last year.

We cannot but feel concerned over the emergence of a real threat in the form of the proliferation of nuclear weapons throughout the planet. It is a common task of the international community to encourage all countries to accede both to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We welcome Brazil's accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Russia is committed to the idea of continued reduction of nuclear weapon arsenals and the maintenance of strategic stability at lower armament levels. In this context, we attach particularly great importance to the Russian-American interaction in the area of reducing strategic offensive arms. In the course of his appointment hearings, Mr. Yevgeny M. Primakov, Chairman of the Russian Government, expressed his firm resolve a few days ago to seek early ratification by the State Duma of the START II Treaty. Likewise, it is important for the United States to ratify all documents related to START II.

Accession of the other nuclear Powers to the nuclear arms control process is now on the agenda. We urge careful consideration of a proposal made by President Boris Yeltsin that calls on the nuclear Powers to deploy nuclear weapons exclusively within the boundaries of their national territories. We note with satisfaction the recent consensus decision in the Conference on Disarmament to start negotiations banning production of nuclear-weapon-grade fissionable materials. What is of special significance is that the decision was supported by States that are not yet parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, among others. We are convinced that such a ban would be a further necessary step in multilateral efforts to enhance the non-proliferation regime and nuclear disarmament.

The nuclear threat has many faces. Today, nuclear terrorism can also be a source of that threat. What seemed to be science fiction yesterday can now, much to our regret, become a reality. Hence, strong action by the international community is required to prevent the real-life emergence of that new form of terrorism. Accelerating work on a draft convention to combat acts of nuclear terrorism, submitted by our country so that it can be adopted by the General Assembly at the current session, has become particularly relevant.

Russia has repeatedly stated at the highest level its firm opposition to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. International terrorism is one of the most dangerous global challenges to international stability. It

can be successfully combated only through united action by all States. Indeed, only by acting together instead of making unilateral power moves, shall we be able to succeed in our fight against that most dangerous of evils.

Militant separatism has become another factor that destabilizes international relations. Relying exclusively on extremist methods in the struggle for the national rights of minority groups within multinational States, separatism often finds itself in league with terrorism and religious fanaticism. Separatism inevitably provokes internal conflicts in which neighbouring countries frequently get involved, thereby setting the stage for stoking regional crises.

More than two and a half thousand national minorities live in 150 countries of the world. Were all of them to aspire to a State entity of their own, the disastrous and catastrophic consequences could easily be imagined. Those who foment separatism should keep that in mind.

The fight against drugs also requires joint, concerted action. We must focus on the practical implementation of the relevant decisions aimed at combating the drug threat adopted by the General Assembly at its special session.

The international community should take a common stand in implementing the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose fiftieth anniversary occurs this year. In this area, too, resolute joint action is needed in respect of those States which, under various pretexts, violate generally recognized human rights and freedoms. There can be no tolerance of double standards involving attempts to shield those who elevate to the level of Government policy discrimination against a part of the population. Russia cannot and will not remain indifferent to the fate of hundreds of thousands of Russian-speaking citizens subjected to harsh repressive measures in Latvia and Estonia. The international community, and above all the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, should closely watch the situation in those countries.

I have touched upon a few of the important issues which the United Nations is called upon to deal with at this time. It continues to play its unique role as facilitator of joint efforts by States to strengthen peace and security, deal with urgent issues and meet new global challenges. To that end, it is necessary to improve United Nations mechanisms and adapt them to today's needs. That is exactly what the process of reforming the United Nations, launched by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, seeks to accomplish. The rationale behind it is enhanced efficiency for the Organization.

That is the angle from which we approach the ongoing discussion on the work of the Security Council. No one should question the Security Council's primary responsibility under the Charter for the maintenance of peace and security. It is extremely important to preserve its effectiveness and its efficiency in decision-making, as well as to build on internal cohesion and work coordination methods developed in recent years.

I should like to reaffirm that we support the implementation of reforms and changes in United Nations mechanisms that will promote effective consolidation of the United Nations and improve its activities. Among the steps taken to that end I wish to mention adoption, under United Nations auspices, of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Russia's initiative to launch a discussion on ways to achieve international information security serves the same goal. In essence, our proposal is intended to offset threats inherent in the use of the latest advances in science and technology for purposes incompatible with the maintenance of international security.

I wish to single out a dangerous tendency: that of adapting the United Nations to meet the requirements of an individual State, or of replacing it altogether as, for example, in the case of peacekeeping. What I have in mind are attempts to undercut the powers of the Security Council, as laid down in the Charter, to use coercive measures. We must not allow a precedent to be created involving the use of military potential in a crisis situation without the consent of the Security Council. Surely it is obvious that such actions could lead to a serious erosion of the existing system of international relations, whose central element is the United Nations.

United Nations sanctions as an instrument of international coercion also require a highly balanced approach. When introduced by the Security Council, sanctions should not become a tool to fight a regime that may be disliked. Sanctions should not make people suffer. They should not destabilize the economic situation in the country subjected to sanctions or in the adjacent region. It is time to fine-tune the mechanism regulating the imposition of sanctions and their duration and the procedures for easing and lifting them.

In short, individual elements of the United Nations mechanism need improvement and retooling. But we should go about it with a full sense of responsibility, mindful of the medical profession's rule that unnecessary harm is to be avoided at all costs.

Every session of the General Assembly is, in a way, a milestone event. Each session is expected to make a tangible contribution to the resolution of acute problems confronting mankind. It will depend on all of us whether or not the fifty-third session of the General Assembly lives up to the expectations and hopes we place in it. It will depend on all of us whether or not joint effective steps are taken to lead us to a more stable, peaceful world, a world free from war and conflict and from financial and economic upheaval, a world built on the principles of democracy and multi-polarity. Russia stands ready to work with others to attain these goals.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the delegation of Australia, Her Excellency Ms. Penelope Anne Wensley.

Ms. Wensley (Australia): On behalf of the Foreign Minister of Australia, Mr. Alexander Downer, who is unable to be here because of our national election next week, I would like to extend warm congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Your country, Uruguay, has given consistent and strong support to the United Nations, and your own expertise and contribution to the development of international law in particular is widely recognized. We know that we are in good hands, just as we were last year with your predecessor, Hennadiy Udovenko. Like him, you may count on Australia's support as you carry out your responsibilities and work to guide us towards constructive and worthwhile outcomes.

As was very clear from the range of issues addressed on the first day and again this morning in the general debate, you take up the presidency, Sir, at a time when the agenda before the United Nations is more challenging than it has ever been Australia is very concerned about many of those challenges and issues. But today I want to focus particularly on the subject of non-proliferation and disarmament, where recent events have brought us to a crossroads in our attempts to steer the world away from the threat of weapons of mass destruction.

Although we heard some pessimistic perspectives yesterday, in Australia's view the progress that the international community has made in the field of arms control and disarmament over recent decades has, in fact, been remarkable — a trend to which the end of the cold war lent added impetus. Many bilateral, regional and international agreements have been concluded, all making a contribution to making our world more secure. Those achievements were driven by the realization that we must work with determination towards a situation where the right to self-defence of all nations, which is, after all, enshrined in the United Nations Charter, must be ensured at the lowest possible level of conventional armament and without recourse at all to weapons of mass destruction. Events which have moved against the tide of this progress have been relatively rare, but when they have occurred they have stood in stark contrast to the preferred direction of the international community.

A survey of the progress made to date in the field of arms control and disarmament points to two key conclusions. The first is self-evident: there is more work to be done. The second is perhaps easier to overlook. In the face of periodic setbacks and challenges, it is vitally important, and in the security interests of all countries, that we stay the course on arms control and disarmament, that we not underestimate or take for granted the value of what has been achieved to date, and that we maintain the broad-based political commitment to the norms and institutions that we have put in place or have yet to build.

A stock-take of progress in arms control and disarmament over recent decades leaves no doubt about the positive direction in which the community is moving in building a global security architecture. In addition to agreements on conventional arms limitation and transparency measures, the balance sheet for weapons of mass destruction is particularly impressive.

A Treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction — the Chemical Weapons Convention — was successfully negotiated and has attracted widespread support, and efforts are under way to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention.

A milestone Treaty now exists — the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) — which bans all nuclear-weapon test explosions and all other nuclear explosions.

Long called-for by political leaders from across all regions, hard-negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament and finally adopted by the Assembly by an overwhelming majority two years ago, the CTBT has now attracted the adherence of over 150 States, and its institutional fabric is being steadily established.

The cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime — the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) — has been extended indefinitely and has achieved near-universal membership, and agreement has been reached to commence negotiations to ban the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons.

In another area, under the strategic arms reductions process, or START, and consistent with article VI of the NPT, deep cuts have been made in the cold-war arsenals of the two largest possessors of nuclear weapons, bringing closer the day when plurilateral and multilateral phases of nuclear disarmament can realistically be envisaged.

With START I almost fully implemented, the United States and the Russian Federation, from which we have just heard, have more than halved their holdings of strategic nuclear warheads over the past decade. START III will bring those same arsenals down to some 80 per cent below cold-war peaks. It is clearly very important for START II to enter into force quickly so that planning for implementation can begin, ensuring there is no interruption to the nuclear disarmament process.

The international nuclear safeguards systems have also been strengthened, enhancing international confidence in the integrity of this regime and its ability to detect and deter non-compliance with non-proliferation obligations. And finally, a treaty banning landmines — what some have called weapons of mass destruction in slow motion — has been concluded.

On the other side of the ledger, the non-proliferation and disarmament regimes have had to withstand serious challenges from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and from Iraq, and the progress towards a universal no-nuclear-testing norm has been seriously jolted by sporadic outbreaks of testing, most recently by India and Pakistan. Unresolved regional tensions in South Asia and the Middle East continue to bedevil and to thwart the attainment of the goal of universal membership of the NPT. While being justifiably dismayed at the disdain of the few for the clearly expressed will of the international community, we can also draw encouragement from the strength of our national and collective responses to these challenges and the resilience of the regimes when so challenged.

It is vitally important that we stay the course, that we ensure that such events amount to no more than temporary deviations from the near-universally accepted norm against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We believe that this is in Australia's national interest and in the interest of international and regional security to uphold the nuclear and other non-proliferation regimes and to continue to do our utmost to pursue effective measures to reduce and eliminate the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction.

In a strange way, the periodic setbacks to these efforts serve to underscore the value of the progress made to date. The very existence of the NPT, and its near-universal membership, highlights the unacceptability of embarking upon a nuclear-weapon programme in today's world. Similarly, it is the very existence of the CTBT, and the near-universal point of view it represents — namely, that nuclear testing should be a thing of the past — that rendered more powerful the widespread disapproval of the spate of nuclear tests earlier this year. The new ratifications which the CTBT attracted following the South Asian nuclear tests were eloquent testimony to the confidence of the international community in and its commitment to the no-testing norm.

Australia would like to take this public opportunity to congratulate Brazil and to welcome it as the most recent member of the family of NPT nations. We call on that handful of States remaining outside the NPT to reflect on the possibility that the 187 countries which have decided that the NPT provides greater security than the nuclear-weapons option might be right, and that they — the outsiders — might be wrong. Australia also calls on them to consider how much more seriously their national security interests would be degraded in a world where the overwhelming majority of States had not embraced the nuclear non-proliferation norm.

My country, as I think is well known, has long been a very firm supporter of universal adherence to treaties on international weapons of mass destruction. We have signed all 13 multilateral arms control and disarmament treaties and ratified all of these bar one; ratification of the Ottawa Convention on landmines, I am happy to say, is in progress. Only four other countries can match this record. We remain committed to making a difference where and when we can in building consensus on the way forward, and we will continue to be as diligent and as creative as possible across the full range of arms-control and disarmament issues.

Our focus, for those who know us well, is always on results rather than rhetoric and on making pragmatic contributions where we can, illustrated by the sort of contributions that we have made to helping to negotiate the key Conventions to which I have referred and by our support for building and strengthening the institutions which work in various ways to support international arms-control and disarmament goals — institutions such as the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), the Association of South-East Asian Nations

(ASEAN) Regional Forum and the nuclear safeguards system.

Experience has shown that these regimes cannot be taken for granted. The existing regimes need continual care, maintenance and vigilance to ensure that they remain effective and that political and financial commitment to them remains strong.

In the NPT area, for example, further work is needed to maintain the strength of the Treaty and to go on to achieve its full implementation and universality. The sixth Review Conference, in the year 2000, following on the recent serious challenges to the non-proliferation norm, to which I have referred, will be one of the most significant in the history of the Treaty. But even if we have a distance to go in terms of the Treaty's value, surely no one would argue that the world would be a safer place without it. Nor could it be argued that the negotiation of the Treaty back in the late 1960s, and the maintenance and strengthening of the Treaty ever since, has not been worth the effort.

And to those few who persist with the tired refrain that the NPT is a discriminatory Treaty, we say "Yes, it is", and for one excellent reason: the NPT allows a temporary state of discrimination between the nuclear-weapon States and the rest of us because, quite simply, the alternative was, and still is, too horrible to contemplate. We might lament that because of the cold war the state of discrimination lasted far too long, but we surely cannot argue that the alternative scenario would have made the world a safer place than it is today. For it was a commonplace of political forecasts in the 1960s, when nuclear weapons were a legitimate security option for any State, that over 20 States, including my own, Australia, would likely choose to exercise that option.

And it is surely perverse, when the titanic arsenals of nuclear weapons accumulated during the cold war are at last being drastically cut, to act against the tide of disarmament by pursuing the nuclear option.

Similarly, no one could argue that we would be better off without a Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Its conclusion, its signature by the five nuclear-weapon States and its ratification to date by two are major achievements — all the more reason to press ahead with the establishment of the Treaty's implementation and verification structures.

A strong start has been made in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention. Its effectiveness is already amply demonstrated, but we need continued political will and financial commitment, as well as the additional ratifications and accessions, for the full security benefits of the Convention to be realized.

Similarly, the Biological Weapons Convention is weakened by its lack of verification and compliance provisions. Work is now under way in the Ad Hoc Group negotiations to rectify this deficiency. We strongly support this Ad Hoc Group and are working together with others to produce an effective and workable protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention.

One of the things that we have been doing — and people may have seen the reference to a meeting about this in today's *Journal* — has been to work collaboratively with many other countries to convene an informal meeting of Foreign Ministers. This informal meeting is going to be held tomorrow, here in New York, and it represents the determination of many countries, at high political levels, to work together to bring us closer to the goal of an early conclusion of an effective protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention.

In conjunction with the international community's efforts to achieve full implementation and universality of existing regimes, we also need new, reinforcing and complementary steps to achieve our overall arms control and disarmament goals.

Commencement of negotiations for a fissile material cut-off treaty is an excellent example of how we should be moving forward in this respect. We see it as the next logical step after the CTBT, and it is one to which we hope the Assembly will lend unequivocal support and encouragement. The recent agreement in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to commence negotiations on a cut-off treaty demonstrates, we believe, the resilience of the non-proliferation regime under pressure. It gives the lie to those who recently pronounced it dead. It is a sign of the international community reaffirming its faith in the non-proliferation principle to which it has been committed for the past 30 years.

I want to refer very briefly to three more subjects: United Nations reform, human rights and peacekeeping.

Like most other Member States, we want this Organization to work better. Some progress has been made. We welcomed the agreement reached on key elements of the Secretary-General's reform package. Indeed, we worked hard and quietly to help bring this about. But it is now very important to ensure that what

has been agreed is effectively implemented — that the task force and the reviews of specific aspects of United Nations organizations all actually produce concrete outcomes and that real change does in fact occur.

Critical to the achievement of real reform will be the resolution of the ongoing problem of non-payment of arrears in financial contributions. The failure of many Member States, including the major contributor, to address this situation hinders all our efforts to strengthen this Organization.

Also, much of the reform process to us appears to have been focused on rationalizing and refining structures and mechanisms and on administrative measures. We think that the next phase of the reform process has to give much more structured thought — and I believe that this is what the Secretary-General has in mind in his presentations to date on the Millennium Assembly — to the kind of United Nations we expect and want in the decades to come. A thorough review of priorities is overdue. Although the lofty ideals enshrined in the United Nations Charter remain as valid as ever, we need to give serious thought to modernizing the ways in which we give effect to those objectives in terms of operational activities.

Australia is concerned, like so many others who have spoken in the general debate to date, that the debate on Security Council reform has stalled. We have had an exhaustive — but, regrettably, inconclusive — discussion over the last year. It is time now to move beyond general discussion to serious negotiation of a reform package, one which will usher in a remodelled Council that is more representative, transparent and suited to the new millennium. This will require serious engagement and flexibility from all involved. My Government remains committed to finding ways to move the debate forward.

Those of you who were here at last year's session of the General Assembly may recall that Foreign Minister Downer raised the issue of electoral groups. We continue to assert that this is an important element in the reform debate. It is over 30 years since the last significant change was made to the regional groups. The drawbacks of the present configuration are becoming more and more obvious: substantial disparities in the size of the various groups and an inadequate level of representation available to many subregions, including Australia's own geographical area of East Asia and the Pacific. We have noted that there is gathering interest among Member States in this subject, and we think it is time that we recognized it as an element of reform which needs to be addressed. Changing the groups to reflect better contemporary realities and the interests of the current membership will, we recognize, require careful thought and patient discussion, and it is simply far too early to put forward any particular formula. But we suggest we could begin by discussing the principles on which a new system could be built and by exchanging views in a thoughtful and non-acrimonious way on how we might take the process forward.

The year 1998 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also 50 years of United Nations peacekeeping. Australia's commitment to upholding the fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains as strong now as it was in 1948, when the Declaration was proclaimed. Members may not know that Australia was one of the eight countries tasked with the drafting of the Declaration and that we also played an important role in ensuring that human rights provisions were included in the United Nations Charter. Fifty years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights represented a common statement of goals and aspirations, a vision of the world as the international community would want it to become.

We still believe in that vision and we see the fiftieth anniversary as a time for the international community to reaffirm its commitment to this powerful document. Similarly, the 50 years of United Nations peacekeeping gives us an opportunity to recognize how far the institution of peacekeeping has come, to take stock of the lessons we have learnt from the past and, perhaps most importantly, to pay tribute to over 1,500 peacekeepers who have made the ultimate sacrifice for a safer and more peaceful world.

Whether we are talking of old problems or new ones, whether we are analysing setbacks or successes, or marking anniversaries, the annual stocktake which this general debate represents offers the opportunity not for a series of set speeches unrelated to each other and ticking off a lot of subjects, but rather a chance to remind ourselves of what the United Nations stands for, to recognize what has been achieved to date, and to recommit ourselves for the future to protecting and advancing those achievements.

I have focused today on disarmament not only as an area of the utmost priority for Australia and Australians, but also as one where we believe we can add value. But the parallels and lessons of disarmament and non-proliferation hold good for other areas of the United Nations activities.

I said at the very outset that the international community was at a crossroads in our attempts to build an international dispensation in which the threat of mass destruction had no place. The achievements of the last 30 years in setting in place treaties, institutions and norms to ensure that we move in that direction are impressive. But they are not invulnerable. Inadequate verification, non-compliance, aberrant behaviour, budget fatigue, reform fatigue failure of political will — all of these things have the potential to unravel and to undermine what we have built together. Effective arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation — like all the other subjects that are being addressed from this rostrum — require large investments of political and economic capital. It might be natural at times, particularly challenging and worrying times such as we are currently experiencing, to wonder if it is worth the cost. Brief consideration of the alternatives is surely enough to convince us that the answer is undoubtedly "yes".

To do otherwise would be to betray not only the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which we are commemorating, but also the very principles of the United Nations Charter.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, His Excellency Mr. Abdus Samad Azad.

Mr. Azad (Bangladesh) (*spoke in Bengali; English text furnished by the delegation*): May I convey to you, Sir, on behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, our felicitations on your unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. With a person of your eminence and experience in the Chair, our session is assured of a successful outcome.

To your predecessor, Hennadiy Udovenko, I express our deep appreciation for a job well done. We truly had a reform Assembly. It was a matter of great satisfaction for Bangladesh to support his brilliant work on United Nations reform, especially through our role as the Chairman of the Administrative and Budgetary Committee. We are particularly grateful that, at the concluding meeting of the fifty-second session, he appealed to the international community for solidarity with the people of Bangladesh at a time when our country was inundated by the worst floods in our history.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In this year's unprecedented floods, two thirds of our country was completely inundated and nearly 31 million people were affected. Over 20 million were rendered homeless. Immense damage was done to crops, roads, bridges, clinics, schools and industrial plants. With the receding of the flood waters, we are bracing ourselves for the even greater problems of water-borne diseases and scarcity of food and safe drinking water, compounded by homelessness and unemployment. Under the direct supervision of Prime Minster Sheikh Hasina, we are reaching out to the affected people with assistance. The enormous scale of damage challenges us with a task of colossal magnitude. The cost of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction has been estimated at approximately $900 million.

The United Nations system, I am happy to say, has responded to our needs and requirements, as have our development partners and many friendly countries. On behalf of the Government and the people of Bangladesh, we would like to express our sincere thanks to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his support for and solidarity with Bangladesh at this hour of need. We are also thankful to the diplomatic missions stationed in Dhaka, the international organizations, non-governmental organizations and Bangladesh nationals abroad for their continued support, understanding and sympathy towards Bangladesh and its efforts to face the challenges. I reiterate here the appeal made by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the generous and continuing support of the international community to Bangladesh in the coming days.

Floods are not unknown in Bangladesh. Flooding as we have been experiencing this year is unprecedented both in magnitude and duration. The Secretary-General in his annual report has referred to threats to human security, including natural disasters. Indeed, of all natural disasters floods cause the most widespread havoc and misery.

Bangladesh, of course, is not the only country to have suffered severe flooding this monsoon season. The cause of this year's floods may well be complex. We cannot help but be perturbed, however, by the observation in the Human Development Report of this year that global warming could permanently flood large areas and play havoc with harvests. The report cautions that the human consequences of global warming can be devastating for many poor countries like Bangladesh, which could see its land area shrunk by as much as 17 per cent with a one metre rise in sea level.

Elements and factors that affect the global ecosystem and the environment are interlinked. They transcend

national frontiers and can be addressed meaningfully only by nations acting in concert. It is a matter of survival for many peoples, and the highest priority should be given to this issue. We have come a long way since Rio, and yet, very few tangible benefits have been achieved in the absence of promised new and additional resources.

Since assuming office following elections in June 1996, our Government has been trying to put in place and strengthen institutions and laws that will reinforce democracy and promote good governance. In December last year, we negotiated an end to the long-standing problem in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Agreement was concluded within the framework of our Constitution, and it fully meets the legitimate concerns of the tribal population. We are now putting into place the necessary laws and institutional machinery pertaining to the Agreement and widening developmental activities in the area. My Government welcomes cooperation in this effort from all our development partners.

Our commitment to democracy and the rule of law has prompted us to accord priority to human rights. We are in the process of setting up an independent national human rights commission. Our objective is to take the human rights issue to the grass-roots level, to increase awareness among our people of their rights that have been guaranteed by our Constitution and to make the process of justice accessible and affordable to all. A lot remains to be done, and we have made a good beginning.

Bangladesh believes in the centrality of the right to development within the human rights regime. The implementation of the right to development will be further enhanced through a binding international treaty on this right. We are therefore very pleased that at the recent summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Durban, the heads of State and Government endorsed our Prime Minster's proposal that consideration be given to the preparation of a convention on the right to development.

At home we have also embarked on a comprehensive programme of reform and deregulation. Social development has remained the main focus of our development strategy. Education, health care, employment generation and women's empowerment within the broad framework of human development continue to receive priority attention. We are focusing on the rights of women and children. The role and involvement of civil society in our development efforts, particularly in the social sector, have been remarkable.

The process of globalization and liberalization brings risks, grave challenges and opportunities, but in unequal ways. The external economic shocks associated with this process are too powerful for the vulnerable economies to absorb. This is now being recognized even by the beneficiaries of globalization. As has been said, the globalization process must reflect a more inclusive vision of shared interests and shared values. We would support the views of the Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that a global economy should mean that no one will be left behind.

We need to ensure that the process of globalization and liberalization meets our development needs. We need to formulate a positive and workable agenda for ensuring that globalization promotes equity and benefit for all. An integral component of the globalization process is unfettered movement of the factors of production, including capital and labour. We need to encourage migration of labour in order to ensure balance in globalization.

Official development assistance in real terms has declined by more than 15 per cent from 1992 to 1996. This decline must be halted and reversed. For the poorest and more vulnerable economies, official development assistance remains indispensable. We call on all developed countries to reach the agreed target of 0.7 per cent for the developing countries and 0.15 to 0.2 per cent for the least developed countries as soon as possible, preferably by 2000.

The least developed countries represent the most vulnerable economies and peoples of the world. The ministerial communiqué issued after the 1998 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council underscored certain timely issues. In particular, I would mention the call for working together for enhanced market access for the least developed countries and to support their efforts at capacity-building. We also welcome the call for further progress towards zero tariff on exports from least developed countries.

Preferential treatment accorded to least developed countries should not be time-bound. The restrictive trade regimes of labour and environmental standards should be made flexible. We need to adequately prepare to address these and other relevant issues in the forthcoming Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held in 2001.

The situation in the least developed countries in particular makes it clear that the eradication of poverty continues to be our overriding concern. It is essential to ensure long-term global security, as well as to achieve sustainable, economic and social development. We believe that the goal of the Microcredit Summit held last year, to reach 100 million of the world's poorest families, especially the women of those families, will become a reality by the year 2005. Effective microcredit programmes provide access to small capital to people living in poverty in many countries of the world. In addition to the eradication of poverty, the microcredit programmes have also been contributing to the social and human development process, particularly the empowerment of women.

As the Secretary-General has noted in his annual report, the world has been free from large-scale regional conflict over the past year. Peace on a global scale and in a meaningful sense, however, still remains a distant goal. The post-cold-war reality underscores that we need to build a culture of peace based on the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and on respect for human rights, democracy, tolerance and wider and equal participation of people in all spheres of human activity. We welcome the proclamation of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the proposed proclamation of the period 2001 to 2010 as the international decade for the culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world. The Secretary-General has been requested to submit a draft declaration and programme of action on the culture of peace to this session. We hope it will be possible for the General Assembly to adopt these documents at the earliest opportunity.

We are particularly concerned that hopes for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East are yet to be fulfilled. The framework for such a peace exists in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principles of the Madrid Conference and the Oslo accords. The principle of land for peace has been accepted by all, and yet our Palestinian brethren continue to be frustrated in their hopes and aspirations. New settlements, expansion of the Jerusalem municipal area and large-scale internment of Palestinians without fair trial cannot promote the cause of peace. Bangladesh strongly believes that nothing should be allowed to thwart the peace process. We would urge that every moral pressure and persuasion be brought to bear upon the Israeli authorities so that the peace process can progress to its logical culmination. We look forward to the early establishment of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital, and to its full membership of the United Nations.

The cause of the sufferings of our brothers and sisters in many African countries, particularly in the Great Lakes region, needs to be addressed more comprehensively. The recent plight of the people of Kosovo is a stark reminder of the not-so-distant events of Bosnia. Peace initiatives in Afghanistan have yet to make any headway. Peace in that country has to be built from within. The problem of Afghanistan can only be resolved by the Afghan people themselves, without outside interference. In such cases, we believe in the significant role that the United Nations can play as a peace-builder.

In the area of arms control and disarmament, some noteworthy progress has been made. The Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines will soon come into force. We welcome the decision of the Conference on Disarmament to set up committees on security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States and also on fissile materials.

For Bangladesh, the pursuit of general and complete disarmament is a constitutional commitment, and we are ready to support any and every move that contributes to this objective. The nuclear tests in South Asia have been the subject of much debate, discussion and concern. In this connection, the initiative of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed to minimize tensions in the region through personal visits and by urging all concerned to contribute towards strengthening peace in South Asia and the world has been widely appreciated. We attach great importance and priority to our relations with our neighbouring countries. We are happy at the announcement of moratoriums on further nuclear testing, and we remain committed to the goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world. We believe that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), to which Bangladesh is a party, provide useful frameworks for establishing a nuclear-weapons-free world. It was a pity to observe that consensus could not be reached in the Conference on Disarmament to set up an ad hoc committee for nuclear disarmament.

Last year, our Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly a package of reform proposals to make the United Nations more streamlined and attuned to present-day problems and realities. Some major decisions were, in fact, adopted by the fifty-second session on the basis of these proposals. This session of the Assembly, we believe, will continue the reform process, resolving in particular the issues relating to the development account, results-based budgeting and the so-called sunset clause.

Reforms have, by definition, to be a continual process. The United Nations has to be adapted to new conditions and problems. On this there can be no two opinions. For the past five years we have been discussing the issue of Security Council reform and expansion. We have articulated our particular concerns in different working groups and forums. At the recent Non-Aligned Movement summit in Durban, the Movement's collective position was reaffirmed. I would also stress that it is the weaker and more vulnerable group of countries that has the most vital stake in a dynamic and effective United Nations and its Security Council. These countries constitute a clear majority among the 185 Member States, and their concerns should not be overlooked or glossed over in any reform or restructuring exercise. While stalemate continues in this area, we are pleased that an International Criminal Court has seen the light of the day after so many years of efforts. Despite shortcomings, the Court is a milestone in United Nations history.

Bangladesh attaches great importance to the coordinated and integrated follow-up to the decisions taken at the major United Nations conferences of the 1990s, as an area which contributes effectively to the reform process. We believe that the outcomes of these conferences provide the international community with the most important opportunity to ensure a better life for the peoples of the world at the outset of the twenty-first century. In particular, we call for concerted efforts to ensure the success of the special session of the General Assembly next June for the follow-up to the Cairo population conference. We also welcome the proposed millennium Assembly session and hope that it will look into the issues that will challenge us in the coming decades. This Assembly session should be our outreach into the future.

The end of all political efforts, as a former United Nations Secretary-General once observed, must be the well-being of the individual in a life of safety and freedom. This is a goal to which no one is averse. It is also something that no nation can achieve on its own in a world that is increasingly interdependent. Peace and security and development in a real sense are indivisible.

Despite the increasing complexities it faces every day, the United Nations is functioning today more effectively and efficiently than before. In recent times it has played a far more constructive and positive role. The United Nations, of course, has its critics and, indeed, may even benefit from constructive criticism. There is always scope for change and improvement. The United Nations has had its share of failures, which so often seem much more glaring than its quiet successes. There can be no doubt that it remains the sole universal platform for humanity to chart its future in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru, His Excellency Mr. Eduardo Ferrero Costa.

Mr. Ferrero Costa (Peru) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Through you, Sir, I would like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his election, which was so richly deserved because of his vast experience in international affairs and his well-known personal qualities. Uruguay, a friend to Peru, represents the authentic aspiration to peace and respect for international law that are standards of conduct for Latin America and for Peru.

I hereby reaffirm my country's unwavering adherence to the purposes, principles and standards enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which provide a guarantee of harmonious relations among States and of the full applicability of international law, as well as a foundation for the worldwide promotion of human rights, economic and social development and cooperation for development — all touchstones of international peace and security.

Only 10 years ago, the community of nations was moved by the dream of building a peaceful, democratic, equitable and multilateral new world order. Today, while we appreciate the continuing extension throughout the world of those positive tendencies, we note as well an accumulation of negative developments that threaten to initiate a period of uncertainty and change posing unprecedented challenges to our multilateral institutions and urgently demanding analyses and strategies to confront them.

The world financial crisis is affecting the very foundations of the international system. The provision of emergency financial relief may help individual countries, but it does not contribute to the health of the system as a whole, and it highlights the imperfections of the existing supervisory mechanisms. There is thus a need for a review of the Bretton Woods institutions and a revision of their policies so as to adapt them to current reality.

The growing imbalance among countries in the economic and social areas is another deeply troubling element. The 1998 *Human Development Report* indicates that 20 per cent of the inhabitants of high-income countries consume 86 per cent of the world's goods and services. In contrast, the poorest 20 per cent consume

less than 2 per cent. This reality underscores the urgent need to foster real sustainable human development throughout the world, as well as within our countries, which are confronting the challenge of relieving excruciating poverty.

Not only is it urgently necessary to strengthen multilateral institutions and achieve friendly cooperation, but it actually can be done. A few indications of current positive trends are the worldwide consolidation of democracy, the recognition of the central value of individuals and their inherent rights, the participation of civil society, the need to modify patterns of consumption and production for the advancement of sustainable development, the development and dissemination of technology and the significant though as yet insufficient progress in the fight against drug-trafficking and the struggle against poverty.

Understanding continues to grow among States regarding the concept of sustainable human development. For the past eight years, we Peruvians have been engaged in a process of national reconstruction and structural reform, the overriding aim of which is the eradication of poverty.

The Peruvian Government, under the leadership of President Alberto Fujimori, continues to implement a series of policies and programmes to improve the quality of life of all our citizens. The fundamental element of these efforts is the strategy for the fight against poverty. Our firm commitment to eradicating poverty is reflected in the national budget, which allocates more than 40 per cent to social spending. The national priority is the reduction of extreme poverty by 50 per cent — from 19 per cent to 10 per cent of the population — by the year 2000. Along the same lines, the Peruvian Government accords great importance to policies aimed at achieving gender equality and the full participation of women, population policies and policies for the protection of the most vulnerable: children, the elderly, the handicapped and internally displaced persons.

In the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Peru remains committed to giving substantive meaning to its content, incorporating its principles in legislation and putting them into practice through education and information and by including them in policies of development. The protection and fostering of human rights is a priority and a duty for Peruvians, which is why we defend the universality, indivisibility, comprehensiveness and non-discriminatory application of human rights.

My country has signed and ratified almost all the international instruments concerning human rights, both universal and regional. Consequently, we call upon those countries that still are not parties to the two International Covenants on human rights and to the American Convention on Human Rights to ratify them, not only in honour of the fiftieth anniversary but also so that they will be consistent with the principles they continually espouse in the international arena.

The persistence of new non-military global threats — such as international terrorism, the intensification of organized crime, corruption and the problem of drugs — adds to the gravity of the present international situation. Peru, which has suffered from terrorist violence, knows that this barbarism constitutes an assault on the individual and on society as a whole. It aims to destroy democracy and fundamental freedoms, in addition to threatening the peace and security of nations. In consequence, we consider all terrorist acts a systematic and deliberate violation of human rights that cannot be justified by any ideology or for any other reason, and that they should therefore be treated only as criminal acts.

Peru categorically condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and urges the international community to combat it vigorously. With the same determination, Peru reiterates that cases of international terrorism should be resolutely combated within the framework of international law.

In 1990 there were 120 thousand hectares of coca in Peru. Today, in a spectacular decline, this has been reduced by half, and with it the number of peasant families linked to the coca economy. Through programmes of alternative development it is possible to avoid a resurgence in the supply of coca leaves. We therefore need to combine national efforts with international support to overcome a complex problem that is a matter of shared responsibility. In this regard, we are promoting debt-swap programmes for alternative development projects. We have also convened a donor consulting group, which will meet next November, sponsored by the Inter-American Bank, the Inter-American Commission for the Control of Drug Abuse and the European Union.

As President Alberto Fujimori stated during the special session of the General Assembly devoted to the drug problem,

"The purpose of the meeting is to secure the complementary financial resources required to implement alternative development, prevention and rehabilitation programmes within the framework of anti-poverty policies and the sustainable management of natural resources." (*A/S-20/PV.2, p. 2*)

I strongly reaffirm that my country is committed to fighting drug-trafficking and its related effects until they are eradicated. The criminal structures of drug-trafficking cannot be given any respite during which they might reconstitute themselves. For this reason the international community must intensify its joint efforts to put an end to this scourge that affects humanity.

Because Peru has recently experienced a crisis situation, we face major difficulties resulting from internally displaced communities. Throughout the world there has been a dramatic increase in the number of the internally displaced in recent years, which makes it essential to strengthen United Nations action in this sphere. Consequently, we declare before the General Assembly the urgent need to further deepen and expand the mandates, programmes and sources of funding for the system's specialized agencies and bodies, with the aim of prioritizing assistance to those countries affected by this problem.

Peru is a peace-loving nation which works for peace and rejects conflict; which aspires to strengthen political and economic cooperation with all countries and groups of countries in different regions, on the basis of common interests and mutual benefit.

In the realm of peace and security, the international community must now unite against new tendencies towards nuclear proliferation and a growing number of internal conflicts and conflicts between States in various parts of the world. To this must be added conventional arms races and the hundreds of thousands of anti-personnel mines that are still deployed in the world, whose shocking and unjust consequences we all know. These facts together threaten to overwhelm the existing capacities of our countries and our international institutions.

Peru vigorously supports general and complete disarmament under strict international control. This is both a necessary condition for peace and an ongoing task of our Organization.

Deplorable recent developments in the sphere of nuclear proliferation underscore the urgency of perfecting the existing non-proliferation regimes and the imperative need for negotiations on nuclear disarmament to go forward. The proposed fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament will have to consider these questions on a priority basis. We Latin Americans now appreciate all the more the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which created in our region the first inhabited zone of the planet to be free of nuclear weapons, and we are continuing to develop ties of cooperation with other nuclear-weapon-free zones.

My country was the first Latin American State to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and consequently rejects any kind of nuclear test anywhere in the world.

The Convention on anti-personnel landmines is a positive sign of change on the international scene. This makes plain the humanitarian concerns that inspire the conscience of the world. We are pleased that it will enter into force in March 1999, and are particularly interested in its full implementation after that date. Accordingly, the international community will have to give its active cooperation and make the utmost effort to remove or destroy the mines already planted in every region of the world.

Peru was one of the first countries to ratify the Ottawa Convention and it already begun to adopt its applicable provisions. We call upon all countries which have not yet done so to ratify or adhere to the Ottawa Convention as soon as possible, as a contribution to peace, security, human coexistence and the development of our peoples. We trust that those States which have already signed it but have not yet ratified it will comply with article 18 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, under which signatory nations must abstain from acts which would frustrate the purpose of the Ottawa Convention.

We believe that the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin American and the Caribbean, which has its headquarters in Lima, can contribute to promoting a culture of peace and strengthening the efforts towards disarmament in the region, including dealing with the problem of mines.

In the foregoing scenario, the reform and strengthening of the United Nations system take on even greater importance. Change and adjustment lead to greater efficiency. The process of structural and functional reform of the United Nations, rendered imperative by globalization and changes on the international scene, makes it necessary to ensure the

coherence of its programmes and activities and to transform the Organization into an agent of sustainable human development.

We believe that it is appropriate and timely to continue our efforts to define the criteria that should guide reform of the Security Council. Decisions on this fundamental matter should necessarily be adopted on the basis of the broadest possible agreement and in the spirit and letter of the Charter of the United Nations, which would itself be revised. The modifications we desire aim towards a more representative and efficient world Organization. In that regard, this effort must not give way to confrontation and discord. Let us rather support all efforts directed towards allowing the Organization to respond to the real needs of all its Member States.

Peru pays tribute to the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations on their fiftieth anniversary and honours the memory of the men and women, soldiers, police and civilians, including Peruvian nationals, who have sacrificed their lives in this noble mission. The peacekeeping operations, in some of which my country took part, are emblematic of the responsibility that the Charter assigns to our Organization.

We wish to reiterate, Mr. President, our best wishes to you and to the Assembly in this new period we are entering, which will surely have important implications for the international community.

The meeting rose at 1.50 p.m.